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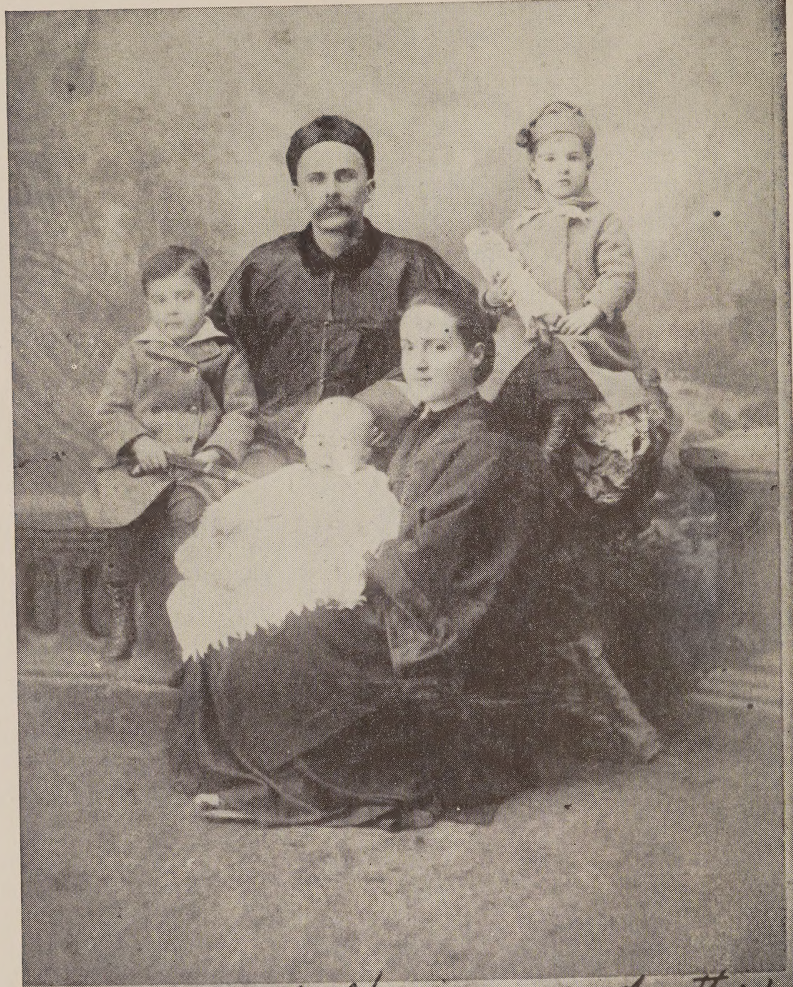
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David Wells Herring and the first Mrs. Herring, Manly, Margaret, and George.

SUSAN HERRING JEFFERIES

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Papa Wore No Halo

David Wells Herring

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FOREWORD

Papa Wore No Halo is the story of an Australian-American family born and reared in China at the turn of this tempestuous century. It is not a missionary biography, though Dave Wells Herring, our Papa, was a Southern Baptist missionary for over forty years, and proud of the fact.

Missionary narration has a way of making saints of its subjects, and all the saints I ever knew were somewhat hard to live with. But Papa wasn't. Together we coped with Boxers, racial and religious mores, fleas, bandits, scarlet fever, kites, wheelbarrows, visiting celebrities, beggars, and civil wars. Coping came as naturally to Papa as breathing. It became our way of life.

Missionary biographies are written from the very best of motives. Therein may lie their weakness. Biblical accounts are, by contrast, severely without bias. In its long history the Bible has proved itself no book for the piously squeamish. They raise their hands in holy horror at the violence and explosiveness of a Moses shattering the tables of stone in angry frustration. They do not like their emotions in the raw. And so they never see the real man, Moses, unperturbed amid the thunderings of Sinai and completely unaware that the skin of his face did shine.

But how does one get a picture without bias? I remember that Papa always froze before a camera, pulling himself to soldierly attention even with a squirming grandchild on his knee. The result was strictly for the cartographers—a map, complete with boundaries, rivers, and mountains—but no photograph of a living, breathing human being. And, of course, neither the camera nor the photographer was to blame.

I am convinced that the best pictures are taken when you sneak up on the subject. You sneak up and lie low as the naturalist does, ignoring mosquitoes and the dank odors of the underbrush. Only when you're practically unconscious yourself and completely merged into the surroundings can you catch the bit of drama you've been waiting for. This is the vantage point of the child before the emergence of egotism. No other viewpoint I could conceive would be fair to Papa at all.

After all, a child is most observant. He sees the significance of things that grownups miss. I remember trailing along the borders of mountain rice paddies one summer day in Papa's wake. It was shortly after he had rejoined the Southern Baptists, discarding native dress and reincasing his long legs in pants more acceptable to the brethren across the seas. But we children were convulsed with laughter. At our eye level the rear-guard action of the pants creases went slanting this way, that way, this way, that way, like chopsticks in the hands of an ignorant foreigner. *Did everyone in America look so naïvely ridiculous?* we wondered.

Papa was nearly fifty years old before we met him, which was nothing to be ashamed of in a land where you add a couple of years to your age to acquire status, anyway. But he'd passed over the horizon before we were tall enough to appraise him with any degree of accuracy. This fact has posed a problem in my narration. In order to chronicle the early chapters of Papa's story antedating our memory of him, I have resorted to a method suggested by the author of Hebrews, where we are told that *Levi . . . payed tithes . . .* [while he] *was yet in the loins of his father* [Abraham]. Heb. 7:9–10. The Biblical allusion has remarkable pertinence in old China, where ancestral attitudes were accepted as inborn. Therefore I ask the indulgence of the Western mind to accept as possible this viewpoint of a yet-to-be-born child. For in a very true sense, Susie, like Kilroy, was really there.

This is a factual story of Papa, but not a history. The chronology may not be, in every detail, exact. But the events are all true. It's hard to remember whether things that happened fifty years ago in China happened on Monday or Tuesday. One event, concerning a Norwegian missionary, has been placed where it best fits the story, although it happened at a different time.

Our family chronicle straggles over several walls of differing cultures and ideologies with an artlessness that now seems very rare. Victorian missionary life bristled with contrasting convictions, but no one seemed to have compunctions about airing his beliefs. We were never left in doubt as to what Papa thought about current issues.

Although the glib expression, "you bet your life," had yet to come into vogue, it applies with singular aptness to Papa. We could see with our own eyes just where he stood, because he bet his life on it—not only his, but ours as well.

All of which may account for the fact that life with Papa was anything but dull, in spite of the ever-present poverty. Sometimes it was dangerous, often frustrating, but *never* dull.

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CHAPTER 1

When You And I Were Young Maggie

A small Yangtze side-wheeler fought the current one raw March morning in 1891. Through the porthole the faint grey dawn outlined two bunks scaling each side of the compartment. It couldn't have been called a cabin.

"Almost dawn," Papa chided himself. "How easy it is to grow lazy!" Unable to stretch his full six feet, he turned over gingerly and smiled across the aisle at his young wife, Maggie.

As if at a signal, the baby, George, opened startled blue eyes and began a protest at the strangeness of the surroundings. Five-year-old Manly and Margaret, two years younger, stirred in the upper berths. Maggie dragged the baby closer to feed him, her lips touching the soft bald head against her shoulder. Even in disarray, her dark hair flowing over a wide smooth brow gave more the impression of an Oriental madonna than of the current conception of a "foreign missionary."

Papa sat up and dropped his feet to the floor, gazing with love and pride at his young wife while his toes sought and found the soft cloth shoes under the bunk. Then he pulled covers on the sleeping children and reached for his *kwa-tze,* his long, padded outer garment.

"What time is it?" Maggie whispered.

"Beyond the hour of the tiger and before the hour of the hare," Papa replied.

"Whatever that means!" She protested.

"Remember what we said about thinking in Chinese?" He laughed. "Only I'm not sure, yet, about the proper use of those pesky symbols."

She nodded soberly. "What time do we get to Chinkiang?"

"*Sai tze-dao?* Who knows? Do schedules mean anything in China?"

Now it was her turn to tease. "It will be easier for you to adapt to their clothes than to their tempo. I must admit you've done pretty well at growing that queue."

Papa pulled it over his shoulder to admire the long silk cords plaited into his own black hair so cleverly that only an expert could tell where hair ended and silk began. "Pretty fair crop for only six weeks, eh? I was afraid I'd look sissy, but you get used to it finally."

"With that carefully shaved forehead and those moustaches? Don't be silly! But you'll have to remember that the Chinese are scared of blue eyes. Amah says they call them 'ghost eyes'!"

Papa grinned. "I'll remember. I'll try not to flash 'em too much."

"And please slow down a little." She cradled George more comfortably in her arms. "For the past week you've been scurrying about Shanghai, getting us more than we really need. Nobody else would have tried to call on every member of the church just because he was leaving for a while. You'll need something to do when you've finished spying out this 'land of promise,' won't you?"

Papa lifted one of Margaret's curls lying on the rough blue cloth that served as sheet by night and baggage wrap by day. "Six months is a long time. Sometimes I wonder if I have the right to leave you and the chil'ren." (Papa always dropped the "d" as if it hardened the term unduly.)

"We'll be all right." Maggie's low voice had an intensity that showed she was bolstering her own morale as well as his. "If having a family had been our main reason for living, we'd have stayed in North Carolina, wouldn't we?"

He nodded. "You be sure to let Bryan know if any of you gets sick. Bryan's a good fellow." He tried to make his voice sound casual. "By the way, I've put my will here next to the medicines. Two copies. Leave one copy with Bryan when you go back to Shanghai. So many worldly possessions: I must take good care of them," he added facetiously.

The baby, satisfied, turned and bounced erect. Maggie changed him and Papa gathered him in his arms, tied on a yellowed woolen bonnet, and folded the trailing quilt into a firm but awkward bundle.

"Go back to sleep while the chil'ren are quiet," he said and slipped through the bamboo-screened opening to the steerage area adjoining.

The rank odor of tightly-wedged unwashed humanity, the sounds of snoring adults, fretting children, and early morning activity greeted him. He picked his way through the crowded mass, climbed the ladder to the second deck and on to the bridge.

A watery sun struggled through the overcast. Against the southern shore the reeds undulated in a misty green only slightly darker than the river between. Sampans and fishing craft quickened the shadows flowing from the shore line. The darker line of a village and, above it, the crest of a mountain range stood in curious juxtaposition like that in a Chinese scroll painting—not necessarily in ignorance of, but superseding, as it were, the Western concept of perspective.

The first mate, a Tsingtao youth who spoke German with the captain, turned to look in astonishment at Papa and his burden in the hatchway.

"First you choose Chinese fare; now you decline the barbarian's privilege of being a gentlemen of leisure." He turned back to the the wheel in a gesture of dismissal.

Papa ignored the rudeness of the greeting. Six years in China had alerted him to the folly of being placed on the defensive. And his youth—thirty-two was extremely young, by Oriental standards—made it even more important that he not lose face before the natives. He watched the scenery as it floated past and tried not to think of the lonely weeks ahead after he'd leave Maggie and the children in Chinkiang.

He pointed out to George a pagoda that seemed to crawl across the horizon. A flock of low-flying geese wheeled above them. The baby cackled merrily. "Wild geese, wild geese, will you arrange the character *jen* for us to see?" The Chinese words, as Papa chanted them, made the baby rock to and fro with joy.

A smile stole over the smooth, boyish face of the first mate. From his expression it was clear to see his conclusion that a barbarian who had discovered the nursery rhymes that had delighted Chinese children for centuries could not be utterly savage. Had the foreigner really comprehended the significance of that written character, *man?* Could he know that wild geese spoke of order in the universe?

Silently the three watched the birds winging their calligraphy across the sky until they were mere specks on the horizon.

The boy spoke again and now there was respect in his voice. "Soon we dock in Chinkiang. First-born sir is taking his family to the beautiful Chutzulin?" He spoke of a celebrated bamboo-covered mountain resort nearby.

"I leave my humble family with friends in Chinkiang, but I plan to see your honorable land so that I can tell my unworthy countrymen of its beauties."

The captain made his appearance, gruffly acknowledging Papa and firing a volley of gutterals at the mate. The boy bobbed his head vigorously, but as he disappeared down the hatch, Papa caught a look of pure malevolence directed at the back of the stocky German. The huge bulk of the captain and his noisome pipe filled the bridge to overflowing. Something about his slouch seemed utterly alien in comparison with the springy grace of even the poorest coolie. *Too much to eat, drink, and grow anything-but-merry on,* Papa thought.

"Und *vat* you doing here?" The captain didn't bother to remove his pipe. The syllables forced through clenched teeth had a truculence that may not have been intended.

Papa chose to think so, apparently, and grinned. "Enjoying the view, sir."

The captain's beard, red streaked with grey, bristled belligerently. "Vat you doing in China?" His voice rose to a bellow. "You choose to stay mit de Chinese, but now you vant de special privilege. You missioneers make me seeck! Vat iss gut about these yellow schwein? Kill them by the dozens and you still haf too many!"

"Why are you here, then?"

"You know how many taels I get for each trip?"

"I can well imagine!" Papa had caught a glimpse of bulging crates of porcelain and bundles of fur stored in the captain's quarters.

The captain lumbered to the rail and spat into the yellow water. "I'm no fool!" There was no mistaking his implication.

"There just aren't enough taels in all of China to make me come here for that reason alone," Papa said.

Again the captain spat. "Three more years and back I go vere I never see any more chinks. Lying, stealing, smelling schwein! Bah!"

Papa turned his attention to the river. It was alive with sampans. They must be nearing Chinkiang.

He went down to his family and found Maggie struggling with the confusion of bedding, clothing, and children.

Manly had his eyes glued to the tiny porthole that was almost at water level.

"Want to go with me for the food?" Papa asked him.

Manly nodded and reached for Papa's hand.

The child looked curiously at the saloon, where several foreigners and wealthy Chinese were being served. In the galley Papa bought some egg roll and steamed bread which he and Manly carried back to their alcove. All around them, the Chinese busied themselves with chopsticks, combs, or their favorite pastime of lice-hunting. The bamboo curtain afforded the little family a measure of privacy. They bowed their heads over the tiny bowls a moment, then began eating with gusto.

"This tastes better'n that stuff upstairs, doesn't it?" Manly said.

"At least it doesn't cost as much. Do you know what our fare would have been, first class?"

"No, what?"

"Ten taels, instead of two. To Ichang it will be only nine more. That's a lot of travel—a thousand miles—and by first class it would have been fifty-five taels at least."

"I don't like that old captain. He'll be nasty to you all the way, I'm afraid," Maggie said.

"Oh, I can han'le him. After Ichang, I'll be going by native boat anyway." Papa set down his bowl and helped Margaret drink from hers. "Not all these steamboat fellows are as testy as he. His crew despises him."

The bamboo curtain parted and the mate stood before them, smiling timidly. "For the baby," he said in Chinese, proffering a boiled egg.

Papa bowed and asked him to join them, but he was quite evidently out of bounds and only smiled his thanks. "I must close the hatch until we dock. But do not fear. The other passengers get scared, but I will not forget to open in plenty of time."

Papa clasped his hands and bowed again in gratitude. "The West could learn from the East," he said to Maggie as the curtain closed again.

Manly climbed to the bunk to peer through the porthole and watch the excitement of their approach to port. When Margaret cried to "see, too," Papa lifted the roll of bedding to give her a perch nearby. However, the froth of the paddle-wheel blanked out all but the scurrying of sampans swarming from the inlet. Feet pounded above and the hull scraped ominously. Outside, the passengers began a muttered protest.

At last the hatch was lifted. Papa and his family watched as their fellow passengers clambered quickly up the ladder, not wanting to be caught in the tide of those coming aboard.

"The Chinese may think well of order in the universe," Papa said, "but they use precious little in the Middle Kingdom."

When the last passenger had scrambled to the deck, Papa helped Maggie and the baby up. The baggage he brought in two loads, piling it at her feet. "Watch out for thieves," he warned. Last of all he, Manly, and Margaret emerged into the sunlight.

Over the milling crowd a human chain hoisted the cargo to the open holds, hands grasping and releasing the baskets of coal with seldom a pause in the rhythm. Once a lump or two of coal jostled from a basket into the river.

The captain swore angrily. "I'm not paying for any coal on the bottom of the river," he snarled.

Swinging down the gangplank to the muddy path, Papa shepherded his little family through the confusion on the river bank. Coolies grabbed his baggage and shoved ahead through a mob of vendors, barrowmen, and duck-herders, the ducks splashing noisily as they foraged through the slime of the roadside. Even after the little procession had moved into the narrow street bordered on either side by open shops, it wasn't easy to avoid puddles without bumping a neighbor, and conversation was nearly impossible.

But Papa made the effort. "How did you like the boat ride, Manly?"

Manly's brown eyes glowed. "Let me go all the way with you, Papa."

"Not this time. Next year when we go to America you'll take a real boat ride!" Papa's eyes met Maggie's. "Whatever drawbacks going native may have, it should whet the chil'ren's appetites for the good old U.S.A."

Maggie smiled at him across Manly's bobbing head. The glance away cost her a collision with an old woman carrying a rooster, head down. Both woman and rooster protested noisily.

Suddenly, amid the confusion, a solidly built white man loomed before them and stopped short with a genial smile. It was Bryan. They shook hands warmly, pedestrians eddying around them.

Fellow exiles from North Carolina, the Bryans and

Herrings had come together to China aboard the old *City of Peking*, spending the Christmas of 1885 on the rough Pacific. Together they had weathered the initial shocks of disillusionment that apparently beset all new missionaries.

"So you're here already!" Mr. Bryan rumpled Manly's hair. "Welcome to you Herrings of the *hai!*"

The reference to the "*hai*" was a facetious play on the Chinese translation of Papa's name. All new missionaries underwent an Oriental christening when the senior staff members picked a Chinese name sounding somewhat like the foreign one and partially descriptive of its meaning. The fishy connotation of the name Herring had evoked the character, *hai*, as in Shanghai, where Papa and Maggie had made their home. Shanghai means "above the sea." Thus it was that Papa's name, translated surname first, read *Hai Da-wei:* Herring, David. (The *Da-wei* was a more-or-less phonetic transplant from the Bible, its meaning in Chinese of "Great Protector" having no relevance.)

After a few pleasantries, Papa kissed his family goodbye and relinquished a tearful Margaret to Bryan's arms. He turned and swung down the incline as if needing the pull of gravity to effect the parting. Aboard ship again, he stood on the deck watching until his family had disappeared from sight. Then he returned slowly to his alcove below.

CHAPTER 2

Odyssey In Cathay

Back in his alcove again, Papa was engulfed in an abysmal sense of aloneness, in spite of the sounds and smells of other humans that crowded in upon his privacy. One passenger's voice shrilled monotonously over the others. Apparently some former business partner had done him wrong and the air grew lurid with the curses evoked. Most of the invectives were new to Papa, but he recognized their nature. No Chinese lightly called another a turtle, or toad. A baby wailed fretfully against the monologue.

Papa read from his Greek New Testament for a few moments, then fell to his knees. When he rose to his feet there were pink spots on his forehead where his fingers had pressed, but his eyes had lost some of their bleakness. He retrieved a tiny, soiled sock from beneath the bunk and smiled faintly as he tucked it into his own baggage. He took out his pen and a pad and set about marshaling his accounts, financial and otherwise. He could face anything that lay ahead much better if he had his mental ducks in a row.

The fact that he was a whole hemisphere away from his denomination emphasized the importance of communicating not only the successes but also the debits of life among China's millions. That, he felt, was as it should be. Having nothing to hide, he welcomed the opportunity of accounting for his stewardship. He would write his reports regularly and mail them at intervals to the *Biblical Recorder*—the news organ of North Carolina Baptists—to be read some three months late, to be sure, but better late than never. What was it Dr. Charlie Taylor had often repeated in his Latin classes at Wake Forest College? "Better a hundred words *here* and *now* than a thousand from a loftier point of view, later."

Being a Baptist meant much to Papa. There was a permanence in the relationship like that of marriage—for better or for worse. He could count on the affection of the folks at home, and he would cheerfully demonstrate his devotion by sharing with them his experiences, whether trivial or sublime. He believed the brethren would be interested in the ungarnished facts about life in China. He would delete none of the discouraging features out of fear of being considered a failure. His own faith had withstood the shocks of disillusionment. Wouldn't the faith of those at home also be strengthened by facing reality with similar courage?

The financial accounting would be easy. There was something solidly comforting about the weight of square-holed cash that hung in chains under his girdle. Wealthy Uncle Alfred Alderman of South Carolina had shown a real faith in Papa's cause by providing amply for this trip. Gratefully, Papa would account for every penny. Not in vain had he learned frugality in postwar Dixie!

Now, with those privations well behind him, he was aware of a sturdiness of spirit—the by-product of those lean years—that would stand him in good stead here in poverty-stricken China.

Well he knew that most of his friends at home had the same outlook. Of that he was certain. They believed it was wise to be careful with the Lord's money. For a few moments Papa mused on the letters that had appeared in the denominational press in the last few months. A rush of approval had followed the concerted action of a group of his fellow missionaries here on the field. The Bryans and Herrings were among the number who, finding living conditions in China much simpler and less expensive than anticipated, had returned a sizable portion of their salaries with a plea that more missionaries be sent with the funds available. If he could judge by the tone of the letters, the cause of missions was gathering interest across the South: the brethren were at last waking to their responsibilities in this part of the world. Papa felt confident that such rapport would be sustained only by complete honesty between his colleagues and the constituency across the ocean. The reporting must be kept direct. It would thus be a matter of pure arithmetic. Yes, the financial accounting would be easy.

But there were other matters that needed accounting. He'd come into possession of a host of disturbing facts that he burned to share with the friends at home. But the coin in this area—the realm of ideas—was harder to sort and account for. You couldn't throw it down on the counter, as the merchants did with the money they handled, to see if the metal had a genuine ring. In this realm of ideas, if you acquired a counterfeit, you were stuck with having to throw years of your own life into the discard. Lying on the bunk, his hands under his head, Papa narrowed his eyes and nodded to himself. He wasn't afraid. Not really. The convictions that gripped him had the ring of truth. And truth was all that counted.

Take the matter of "rice Christians," for instance. Why pretend they were genuine currency just for the sake of glowing reports to the home constituency? The folks at home needed to know just how the lure of foreign money could produce these spurious imitations of the genuine article. True, it would be a jolting experience to learn that mission money could become what the apostle termed "filthy lucre." But, as in a good marriage, so in a denomination, you didn't shut your eyes to the facts of life and pretend they didn't exist just because they were unpalatable. His fellows across the sea were ignorant of life in the Orient, as he himself had once been; but fools they were not! They would realize, he believed, that converts of rare quality could be made of the natives if one chose to live simply among them, identifying oneself as a fellow human in an imperfect world. In the light of what he was learning, this would have to be his personal goal, whether anyone at home understood it or not.

On the other hand, Papa had no desire to build his own ego by criticising the work of others. He'd seen how the relatively feeble mission enterprise had been caught up by the expanding commercialism of the ports and how there was little that anyone could do to withstand the tides. You couldn't blame the natives for rushing to get their share of the silver that flowed into the coastal cities from every land across the seas. The attitude of most foreign traders was one of contempt for the small brown hordes as for so many wharf rats. For such an attitude Papa had only condemnation. But when he'd searched the same swarms from far different motives, looking in vain for men with self-respect—the only kind of soil in which the seeds of Christianity could take root—he'd met with complete frustration. Papa had the greatest admiration for those who had bucked the tide, year after year after year. But he'd lived too close to the sea as a boy not to feel that tides and undercurrents demand respect too.

Inland China, however, was a different matter. Shanghai was no more like Inland China than New York City was like—like Pender County in North Carolina. Papa smiled, remembering the Southern resentment of Yankee condescension that had surrounded his boyhood. He could count on the sympathy of his brethren at home in this conviction. Fresh out of the Reconstruction, they would see the issues involved and feel keenly about them. They would know that ideas—no matter how noble—foisted on a people from some faraway vantage point never really take root. They would understand the need for mission methods to remain simple and personal. Perhaps, as he shared his experiences with them, they'd see that invested missionary effort was a long-term matter, promising little return immediately, but yielding dividends of great value in the long run. Certainly, sharing the problem with his friends was the only thing he could do at present, and this trip was affording a priceless opportunity to point up the significance of mission polity.

One difficulty loomed before him. His letters would reach only those in his home state, and denominational policy was decided on a wider level. The Baptist press was already very much concerned about a lack of unity in the homeland. Each of the Southern states was represented on the Foreign Mission Board, which had its office in Richmond. A rift had been caused in Baptist ranks by the War Between the States. No one wanted any further breaks. But how could you insist on democratic procedures and not rock the boat a little? However, there were some things even more important than unity. Integrity, for instance. Faith in Baptist democratic procedure was the only answer. And such procedure was a matter of great pride in the denomination. It was a matter of great pride to Papa. If he had had to convince but one man or a small group of men, his job would have been simple. As it was, he must give an account to the whole sprawling Southland.

But that's the way Papa would have it. Really, he welcomed the challenge. Perhaps only a Baptist could understand it, but not being able to pass the burden of decision-making on to others "in authority" gave him a sense of completeness, of adulthood. This was what it meant to be a man in the largest sense of the word. And Papa had a great desire to become a man and put away childish things.

The opening account of his journey completed, Papa screwed the cap on his pen and made his way to the deck again. The glare of sun on the yellow waters of the Yangtze had sent most of the passengers below decks. Papa welcomed the rush of cool air and the solitude. It was as if his thoughts needed just that to fall into place again. So what, if he was writing only to fellow Baptists in faraway North Carolina? Were they fundamentally different from those in any other state? Were they fundamentally different from these Chinese, after all? He was more sure of himself now than ever. If he had to start all over again, he'd bet his life on being a Baptist, chiefly because Baptists were supposed to be willing to face facts—even unpleasant facts. The convictions that had launched him from early harbors of complacency would carry him over waves rougher than these on the mighty Yangtze. His nose reddened as he faced a chilly wind. The captain passed him and nodded brusquely. Papa felt vaguely sorry for the man. He had no such convictions as those that undergirded Papa to buoy his spirit. He was more to be pitied than blamed, really.

The next day their ship passed the Little Orphan, a tiny wooded isle topped by a small pagoda. An elfin sort of red-tiled temple clung to leeward. No one had challenged Papa's right to stand by the rail on the first-class deck, though he was prepared to go below if the captain appeared and raised the issue. Under his arm he carried a Chinese New Testament. He knew that, armed with either a book or a baby, he would usually get a polite hearing from the natives.

A steady wind swept the clouds thickly above them, rippled the yellow waters, and filled the brown patched sails of the boats dotting the river. A passenger beside him pointed a long-nailed hand in the direction of the passing bit of woodland mirrored briefly in the Yangtze. "You know how it came there?"

Papa recognized the rounder tones of Anhwei province. He bowed. "I am ignorant of much in your celestial land."

"In ancient times this rock dwelt with another like it, called the Big Orphan, in the Po Yang Lake. But they quarreled, and the god of the lake determined to separate them. He put quicksand under this one and sent it floating down the river."

Their gowns rippled in unison against their legs. Papa braced the book under his armpit and slid his hands up to the elbows inside his sleeves. You learned to hoard everything in China, even the warmth of your body against the dampness. An answering gleam of humor showed briefly in the brown eyes of his companion, and his well-manicured hands disappeared in the same manner. Much more had passed between them than met the eye.

The Chinese gentleman nodded toward the waves hurling spray against the upper rocks of the island. "It's always cold here. This is where the Little Orphan met the dragon. There, you can see how his tail thrashes, forever pinned under the island."

Does he believe it? Papa wondered briefly and smiled to himself. *Do Westerners believe themselves when they say the sun "rises"?*

"You are a trader?"

"In a fashion," Papa replied. "My wares are not material, however." He indicated the book under his arm. "And you?"

"I am a silk merchant. My name is Chieh."

They fell to discussing the state of affairs political. Mr. Chieh was indignant over the amount of squeeze being extorted by "Cobbler's Wax Li," the hated eunuch of the

Empress Dowager. "How much longer the country can stand to be bled by that leech is my present wonder," Mr. Chieh said.

Papa had a lively curiosity about China's political turmoil, having grown to manhood braced against the turbulence of the Reconstruction South. He had small use for carpetbaggers on any shore. Dimly he knew that China had been involved in a civil war at the same time as the War Between the States, but not until he'd listened to talk away from the ports had he learned how much the people of the soil of one hemisphere had in common with those of the other. The "Tai Ping" Rebellion had surged initially as a righteous cause, much as had the abolitionist cause in New England, only with a different fate. *Tai Ping*, meaning "great peace," was at first hailed by the Western world as a movement that might pave the way for a rapid introduction of Christianity throughout China. The rebels had destroyed temples and introduced neo-Christian forms of worship. But righteous causes have a way of flowing into torpid reservoirs of greed. When the British soldier, Charles George, better known as "Chinese," Gordon finally smashed the pent-up resources of the rebels, he was hailed by the West as the brave restorer of peace in the Orient. The hero of the Chinese, however, was Tseng Kuo-fan, who had borne the brunt of a long and tortuous campaign in the face of staggering odds. With trade re-established, the decadent Manchurian Empire took a new lease on life—such as it was.

Mr. Chieh had few illusions about the state of affairs in Peking. Like most of his countrymen, he was a realist.

But Papa found in him a profound sense of history. The wind swayed their long black queues as if emphasizing the need of time in the growth of both queues and opinions. Both men were silent for a few moments. "We are treading upon the hoarfrost and realize that the winter is at hand," Mr. Chieh said at last.

"Those words are rich in meaning," Papa said. "Do I recognize the *Book of Change?*"

A pleased response glowed in the dark eyes. "You have read our *Kung Fu Tze?*"

"I wish I knew more," Papa said, nodding. "There are words here in my book that are very similar. Would you be interested?"

"Of course. Which of us does not need the wisdom of the ancients?"

Papa turned to the thirteenth chapter of Romans and his finger ran down the column and stopped.

Peering closely at the fluttering page, Mr. Chieh read the words aloud, enunciating the tones with a measured dignity. "This is interesting," he said eagerly. "Not a year that is dying, but a day that is quickening. I like that about the 'armour of light.' "

"There is a—a—" Papa fumbled for the Chinese word for "challenge." "It makes you want to compete for the victory," he finished lamely. "Please tell me how you would say it."

Mr. Chieh peered again at the words and tapped his teeth thoughtfully. "Perhaps not just compete, but strive with certainty," he suggested tactfully. "So, not so?"

During the next week, as they cruised upstream, the two men talked often, for hours at a time. Mr. Chieh bought a New Testament, which he always wrapped carefully again in its blue cloth covering after each session. Even when Papa went below decks to dine, there was no hint of condescension on the part of his friend, though it was evident that he felt a little sorry for Papa that a mere accident of birth had deprived him of the privilege of Chinese citizenship. His attitude made sense to Papa. Away from the coastal cities and foreign thought, there was nothing derogatory about being a native. Mr. Chieh's natural pride of race, rather than precluding the art of communication, actually enhanced it.

There was one other missionary on board, a Canadian. Twice Papa sought to strike up conversation with him but without success. He wrote in his journal:

> Most foreigners are eager to communicate with those of their own race. Maybe he thinks that, by going native, I have betrayed my cause. Perhaps he fears I'll want to sponge off him. But he needn't worry.

On the seventh day from Chinkiang, the first mate stopped to point out a landmark. "When we see that pagoda on the riverbank, soon we arrive at Ichang. See, there is the hill near which we anchor."

As the ship eased into her mooring place, the leisurely life aboard the steamer seemed ended forever. Sampans and houseboats jostled each other in a mad scramble for advantage. Whether their owners trafficked in food, transportation, merchandise, or alms, their urgency had a desperate life-and-death quality. As Papa found a seat on a sampan and stowed his gear under him, a splash and scream startled him. Somebody had knocked a baby off a houseboat into the swirling yellow waters.

Papa kicked off his shoes, tore at the long mandarin garment that would have hampered him, seeking a glimpse of the little victim. But all he could see was the crowd, standing now, and craning toward the excitement. Finally a grappling hook lifted the dripping, blue-clad bundle, and Papa was relieved to hear a lusty wail. The crowd laughed as the mother clasped her spluttering infant. "All that over a mere girl!"

Crowding the riverbanks at Ichang were craft of every description. Their sails furled, the weatherbeaten junks seemed fitly named and not at all like the sturdy craft they were under sail. Papa appraised the houseboats with care but gave the faces of their owners even greater scrutiny. He was looking for a home for the next thirty days and knew that the success of the trip depended equally on the stoutness of the boat and the skill of the *lao ban* (literally, "old plank"), as the natives called the skipper. When at last he found a combination looking to his notion, the boat not too clumsy, he circled it warily and made a casual offer.

The *lao ban* laughed. "*Ai ya!* You've not seen the rapids, so?"

Papa drifted off and appeared interested in another boat.

"How far did you say you wanted to go?"

The contest was started. Papa knew he was being sized up too, and he had no intention of being pushed around. The fierce haggling gave way in a final burst of laughter, in which the neighboring boatmen joined. They settled for a hundred and fifteen dollars, Mexican.

Immediately the relationship between them took on permanence. The *lao ban* was a lean man, slightly stooped, the furrows under his high cheekbones bespeaking a ready good humor.

"Stow his belongings here," the captain indicated to a stripling who'd been watching the proceedings curiously. "And hasten to tell Fu Wang-ti that I'll need ten men by daylight." *A man who's used to being obeyed,* Papa thought with satisfaction.

He stooped to enter the matting-covered interior. A kettle hung above the small terra-cotta stove. Suspended from the arched roof were other utensils, including a small lamp dish with a drooping wick of foul odor. Stuck through the ribs above his head was a varnished paper umbrella. Papa hoped it wouldn't rain much. There was plenty of dampness without that. He hung his garments on the small lengths of bamboo that dangled above the area where he was to spread out his bedding roll.

By daylight they were ready to go. There was a heady excitement in the air that no one could miss. Two chickens were killed and their blood sprinkled fore and aft to propitiate the gods of the river for the dangerous voyage ahead. A string of firecrackers spluttered across the bow. The oarsmen crouched into position as the ropes were loosed and sprang into action at a shout and stamp from their leader. The wind guttered the red candles that burned aft near the smoking incense.

Papa found a seat near the *lao ban,* who squatted before the tiny stove, blowing charcoal to life. The air was filled with the swish of the current and the clamor of men against the mighty Yangtze.

Presently the aroma of stewing chickens filled the air. Papa was surprised to find he was ravenously hungry and glad to be among the first to breakfast. He watched the oarsmen bending to their task and admired the burnished sheen of their rippling torsos. How long could they stand this punishment?

At the day's end a halt was made and the boat drawn up to shore and tied to rocks. Under the matting roof the hands squatted to eat again. Papa was glad he'd learned to use chopsticks. *How much better to eat with one hand, rather than the two required for knife and fork,* he thought.

After much friendly jabbering the boat hands packed themselves head to foot athwart the boat like sardines and fell almost immediately to sleep. Not so Papa. The night was alive with noise. Frogs croaked at the river's edge. The timbers beneath him groaned and creaked with each lapping wave. About midnight he made out the regular splash of oars approaching. Was he going to be shaken down by some evil confederate of the *lao ban?*

Papa lifted his head to see if anyone else was alert. The snores ground on monotonously. Finally, with the sudden jolting of the boat, the *lao ban* came awake.

"What do you mean, disturbing honest people?" There was no mistaking his indignation, although Papa couldn't catch the full import of the volley of words exchanged. Something about smuggling opium?

The *lao ban* was pacing up and down and swearing lustily. Wasn't he known all up and down the river? Sure, he had on board a preacher of some gospel. "*Pu gan nao-hsing*, not even I would dare disturb him."

Only a fool would board here, even with a search warrant from the Empress herself, Papa thought in grim satisfaction.

By daylight things looked much less sinister, and they were off again, after a quick and noisy breakfast. The hands cleared the deck in minutes in order to gain the rapids early in the day. Soon they were entering the gorge. The walls of rock, rising from the river some two thousand feet in places, looked like the work of some fantastic axe of antiquity. In solemn stillness they sailed slowly past unfolding grandeur. Even the coolies seemed awed. Looking back, Papa noted with amazement that the walls had closed in behind them and the mountains ahead were topped by lowering clouds.

"You wish to know how these cliffs were formed?" one of the oarsmen asked Papa during a brief rest. "Many years ago when the waters in the west had started overflowing the country, spreading death and famine, the fish-god cut a way with his hatchet for the waters to the eastern sea." He pointed to caves pocking the heights and an occasional white tower perched precariously on a tilted ledge of rock. "See how the smoke from the fires always goes straight up to heaven. The gods have given us a means of protection. Watchers are in every cave to give the signal if enemies approach."

"But aren't the telegraph lines much more efficient?" Papa had noted their anachronistic march across the horizon.

The fellow spat over the gunwale. "Those? *Pah!* They are there only because the Empress is afraid of the barbarians. Of what use are poles stuck in the ground? If you listen to them you hear the souls of the dead crying to be out."

At the first rapid Papa jumped ashore. He climbed ledge after ledge till, breathless, he threw himself down on the summit to rest and gaze with awe. Far below, his boat inched upstream while east-bound boats rushed by with merry chorus. The larger junks were like canoes in the setting of immensity. Every slightest sound was picked up and magnified by the echoing cliffs: the lowing of cattle, the bleating of goats, the laughter of children, bird songs, and through it all the incessant roar of the waters below.

He could almost imagine he was in Carolina with the Blue Ridge Mountains to the west and the little fields greening with peas and spring wheat. He pulled his Testament from his girdle and started to read. Some missionaries forced a Sabbath observance on the Chinese, but Papa thought there was small value in worship that wasn't rightly motivated.

The battle cry of cargo boatmen making ready to descend the rapids claimed his attention. Nearer and nearer they plunged, faster and faster, till, breasting the brink with a wild yell, they outdid the waters in madness, fighting for speed lest they lose control of the boat. Down they careened, surely to disaster. The prow disappeared. Then suddenly rising on the great volume of foaming, raging whirlpools, the boat shook herself in proud triumph, only wet and washed by the spray. Papa waved and shouted with the boatmen.

All this time his boat was making ready for the ascent. She hugged the shore where, though rocky and dangerous, the current was not so strong. Two long bamboo cables were manned by some seventy men recruited for the purpose. The *lao ban* had showed him how the boat had been built in sections in order to survive a gash in the hull, but the clumsy bulk seemed poor protection now. Screaming frantically, the whipper, or *tai-wan*, ran along the tow lines, striking the ground in a frenzy as the boat reeled, first to one side, then to the other. The men strained and lurched as their rope sandals clutched the worn paths. *How many centuries had witnessed this struggle?* Papa wondered. *Ten, fifteen, twenty? No wonder foreigners were resented as johnny-come-latelies!*

He was suddenly aware of a circle of curious children about him.

"It flows with the color of glory," one said, pointing to the stylographic pen Papa used.

"Want to see it?" Papa unscrewed the cap.

They laughed and hung back, abashed. One boy, bolder than the others, said something that Papa couldn't understand because of a difference in dialect. Noting a blankness of expression, the boy leaned down and bawled in Papa's ear so loudly that for a moment, as Papa recorded it, "I was really as deaf as he thought me."

Aboard the boat again, Papa noted a wrecked junk, the cargo spread out on shore to dry while the boatmen repaired an ugly hole in the stern. Whenever a halt was made outside a walled city, he carried a load of books and pamphlets to sell in the market place. He was treated courteously, offered the pipe and tea. Once, after dark, while they lay in the bay, singing girls came alongside in a little covered boat, a brilliant lantern illuminating their pretty faces.

"Tell them to sing for us," Papa said to the *lao ban.*

They handed across a fan on which were written perhaps twenty song titles. One girl sang Papa's selection, another beat time with bones which she tossed with a careless air, a third played an accompaniment on the lute, and all joined in on the chorus. It was a soft and quaint little ditty. Nothing so natural had Papa seen in all his meanderings about Shanghai. They seemed pleased with the coins he threw across into their boat.

As they neared Fengtu several days later, Papa gave instructions to the *lao ban* to pick him up on the far side of the peninsula on which the city lay.

"You are going to try to see the Gateway to Hell?" The captain shrugged. "Foreigners not allowed there."

"Can't hurt anything to try," Papa said.

The only opposition he met was that of a dog which squatted in the path before him, snarling and showing his teeth. Papa picked up a clod of dirt and hurled it. The dog yelped and retreated. *Maggie will be glad to know that David's hand has not lost its cunning.* He grinned to himself. Papa liked nothing better than to quote the profound apropos the ridiculous.

"What are you trying to do? Kill my dog?" an old woman stormed, not too indignantly.

At an eating shop he fell into company with three fellows whom he couldn't get rid of. Yes, they were going to the temple, too. One of them said he'd been to Chunking and had heard the doctrine and was a Christian, so he was going to follow Papa.

So? Papa said to himself, *you have no face to lose, and you take me for a fool.* He quickened his pace.

Their chattering slowed as they strained to keep up. On the ascent to the hill, which was supposed to lie directly over hell, Papa easily outstripped them.

In the dim recesses of the old temple he mingled unobtrusively with the crowd. It was a feast day, and the chorus of the worshipers rose like a dirge above the smoke of candles and incense.

He peered curiously at the ancient pictures, which reminded him vaguely of Paradise Lost. They portrayed elegant folk looking down in perpetual complacence on the arena of suffering. Here victims were being thrown to coiling serpents. Faces torn in frozen anguish hovered over caldrons under which flames forever licked. Two girls wailed around an aged father who was being tortured on a rack. An ugly lout bowed before a haughty mistress, his face upturned and twisted to reveal his insatiable lust.

"It didn't take long for me to see all I wanted," Papa wrote in his journal. "I decided to take myself off before my fellow travelers could stir up mischief."

The next day, Sunday, Papa sought out the lone family of Protestant missionaries in the sprawling city. He was full of praise for the high order of their self-sacrifice but faithfully reported the discouraging statistics. "Twenty church members, but sixteen are on the payroll. How many would remain true if the missionaries had to leave?"

And he didn't like their mode of baptism, for he was sure they knew better than to sprinkle. "Of course when they get to heaven, they'll admit the error of their ways, but I didn't feel that I could take communion with them and sanction their departure from Scriptural methods."

With the eyes of a North Carolina farmer, he noted the straight rows of tobacco "already ten leaves high" that grew on the fertile upland plains. He wrote, "The rows are as straight as those my pa used to encourage me to plough in faraway Pender County."

The river was beginning to rise with the first melting of snows in the mountains beyond Chunking, and the *lao ban* was growing anxious to get his boat and crew downstream before the annual flooding. Every evening Papa jotted his notes while the *lao ban* busied himself with his water pipe and a running account of experiences which Papa suspected were dredged more from a fertile imagination than from actual happenings. Papa had grown fond of his protector, somehow suspecting that life would be more complex outside the haven of the weather-beaten old craft, either afoot or astride some beast of burden. But he really didn't know how genuine was his host's concern over his welfare until the warm evening he decided to take a swim in the river.

It had been an exceedingly hot day and Papa noted that they had anchored in a quiet bay where the current wasn't too rapid. He stripped and dived in before the boatmen were aware of what he was doing. Shaking the drops from his eyes on emerging, he was amazed to find that the *lao ban* had whipped his crew into a frenzy of activity. Nets and ropes were being hurled ahead of him into the water, and the anchor was up preparatory to making a desperate rescue. Although they all lived on the river, none had any feeling but horror for exploring the depths. Papa laughed and turned to floating on his back to reassure them, but they were not to be reassured; not even when he clambered over the gunwales to flex his muscles and demonstrate his enjoyment of the frolic.

Dressed again, Papa emerged from the cabin to face the *lao ban* with stern eyes. "My watch is gone."

"Did *Hsien-seng*, First-born sir, take it into the river?"

"You know I didn't take it into the river." The watch had been a gift from Maggie and he had no intention of losing it.

The *lao ban* nodded. "I have an idea who has taken it, and you will get it back." He leaned toward Papa. "Better not make thief lose face. By morning it will be in Teacher's hand."

Papa watched closely, but he never saw just how it was done. The *lao ban* scolded furiously during the meal, but as far as Papa could tell, any one of the ten men might be guilty. Their faces were equally inscrutable. Once he started to insist that the crew be searched, but thought better of it. The careful avoidance of losing face was something he was beginning to respect.

Sure enough, by morning the watch was returned, artfully placed on his Bible just as he might have left it himself.

When he paid off the *lao ban* and saw the boat head downstream, Papa knew a moment of qualms. He was on his own now, for sure. He hired a pony and muleteer for the first day of overland travel, walking some and riding some in order to get muscles limbered for the long jaunt.

Not being able to accommodate the stirrups to his legs, he had to ride with his knees up under his chin.

What would he find in these mountains lying before him? Was he right in thinking he was nearer to the people this way than living in the thick of things in Shanghai? And if he was nearer, to what advantage? If he should be killed, it would take weeks for the news to trickle down to the coast. Even if he did learn what it meant to be a pilgrim journeying up the highest sacred mountain in Asia, he still had no guarantee that his crusade would not prove a futile gesture. What was one man among the blue-clad swarms in all this vast land? Thick and fast the questions assailed him. The answers came more slowly.

CHAPTER 3

Buddha's Glory

Papa's journey now lay in the salt-mining territory. He dismounted and peered curiously at the feverish activity, marveling at the poverty-sharpened ingenuity of the natives. As busy as proverbial ants, the bronzed figures, clad only in blue trousers, padded through their prescribed routines. Some carried water, others fed the fires that burned under three hundred or more great kettles, day and night. Still others tended the miles of bamboo pipelines transporting the brine.

This process had been going on century after century, long before ever William the Conqueror had invaded England. "How short the history of the Western world in comparison with that of China!" Papa wrote in his journal. "These fellows know more than the Romans did when the famous aqueducts were built. They have discovered that water seeks the level of its source. Irrigation here is not the laborious process that we see nearer Shanghai, where weary cows or buffalo turn the machines for raising water. Here, tall wheels, twenty or more feet in diameter with a clever arrangement of bamboo tubes on the rim, catch and empty the water into troughs which conduct it to any part of the field desired."

Heading ever westward toward O Mi Shan, China's most famous sacred mountain, Papa soon left behind all evidence of missionary labor. The muleteer made it clear that he was having no part in the ascent to the mountain. "O Mi Hsien, yes; O Mi Shan, no," he said, feigning a great concern for his pony. He scowled as he plodded beside the moth-eaten little beast. "Only a half-wit would feel the need of worshiping Buddha at this time of year," he muttered glumly, unaware that Papa could understand his complaints.

But it would have taken more than the threat of bad weather to daunt Papa. He had the conviction that he couldn't really understand the Chinese without at least trying to learn the traditions and motivations of their worship. Did they always walk in fear, as it seemed? What would it be like to lift the cloud of superstition and substitute the light of truth in even a few lives? A dour muleteer could even become a happy one, perhaps.

The first day they wound through foothills, but the next morning found them climbing steeply. Once, while descending, Papa felt safe enough to look back and laughed to note that his companion had the pony by the tail, holding that end, at least, to the earth. Supper and lodging cost them about eight cents apiece each night.

Sunday afternoon they reached O Mi Hsien, the city that lay almost in the shadow of the famous mountain. Papa dismissed his conveyance and began a search for a coolie with a *tiao-tze*, or carrying pole, to bear his bedding. He would take the mountain afoot like any other pilgrim. He made his way to the west gate of the city, where coolies sprang eagerly to sell their services.

"See," one said, stretching his biceps, "I am the strongest. And I have been many times to the sacred mountain, so I could be your guide, too."

Almost savagely another displayed calves with muscles that rippled impressively. But Papa didn't like the expression on his face. He pointed to a man whose eyes literally bulged with curiosity over the bickering. Obviously he was no city-slicker. It would help to have someone reasonably honest as well as strong, and Papa believed firmly in the honesty of those who lived by the soil. "You, how many years have you? Perhaps you are not strong enough?"

Like an eager puppy responding to a kindly pat, the coolie sprang forward. "Few and miserable have been the years of my life," he said. "I remember only forty-two years, but I have ploughed the fields and have the strength of ten. See?"

Papa laughed. *He could be quoting from Jacob's reply to Pharaoh, and from Sir Galahad himself. What a combination!*

Subtracting the two to four years all Chinese add to their ages for good measure, Papa judged the man to be about six years his senior, perhaps thirty-eight. He had lost two of his front teeth and looked wizened. But his seniority would be something of an asset, for he would address Papa as "First-born sir" and furnish a measure of status to an alien.

Papa outlined his projected journey: up O Mi Shan, back down again, and northward to Chengtu—some three or four weeks of walking. They dickered briefly and settled for about six dollars, Mexican, including rice.

The next morning, Jacob (as Papa called him) showed up at the inn at the appointed time. He made a great to-do about the loading of the burdens fore and aft on his *tiao-tze*. Then he swung off rhythmically down the street ahead of Papa, bouncing across the puddles and slime much more expertly than Papa could dodge them. Papa congratulated himself on his choice.

At the gate of the city they waited impatiently for the gate-keeper, who finally appeared to swing open the cumbrous panels on their rusty hinges.

By seven o'clock, after hot millet porridge and tea, they were striding along the ancient road worn by centuries of travel and lined by grave-mounds otherwise unmarked.

They stopped to *chih fan* (eat rice) at nine. Ahead of them, dark clouds lay over the looming mountain, and there was an air of urgency among the many servants and apprentices who were carrying provisions to the two thousand or more priests on the mountain. Late in the afternoon, old Jacob wanted to stop again for rice.

"We've eaten twice already," Papa objected. He grew uncomfortable as he noted the hankering glances cast toward every rice shop they passed. Once he detoured briefly to examine an old temple and emerged to find his companion with his head buried in a rice bowl. "O, well, he's probably never had his belly full before," Papa said to himself.

Papa fell into step with a young Buddhist priest. The boy looked to be about fourteen years old, showed a healthy curiosity in Papa, and seemed willing to ask and answer questions. "You live on the mountain?" Papa asked.

The boy nodded. "At the Whong Fu Monastery. You have heard of the Whong Fu Monastery, of course."

Papa hadn't, but he chose not to display his ignorance. The boy was curious about Papa's background. "There's a famine in your land which drove you here?"

"I wished to see for myself the beauties of your sacred mountain," Papa said.

The boy looked about, as if seeing for the first time the deep shadows under the evergreens, the ridge upon ridge cascading of the mountain above them.

"Do you think your superiors will entertain me, a stranger?"

"Many pilgrims come. None are turned away." He climbed nimbly, watching to see if Papa would fall behind.

They were passing deep gorges. Falls of fabulous beauty made by the dashing torrent below roared almost continually, muted only by the heavy foliage. Once they crossed a suspension bridge about 150 feet long, which swayed precariously under their cautious tread. A fine rain began to fall, and Papa slipped twice on the slick road. This amused the boy enormously. The coolie with the bedding had fallen far behind. Papa stuck more closely to his small fellow traveler.

"Here's the place." The lad stopped, pointing to a dense grove of trees.

Papa could see neither temple nor gate. The path led under drooping trees to something, however. The boy stooped to tie his sandal. *He doesn't want to be held responsible to his elders for my coming,* Papa surmised. *But here I am and here I stay.*

He ducked to avoid the wet, overhanging branches and discovered a tall gateway and long flight of stone steps before him. At the top, a priest bowed courteously and Papa returned the greeting.

He was ushered to a sprawling veranda overlooking a large court. "Here is where you will sleep tonight," his host said. Again Papa had to stoop to follow the *ho-hsiang* (priest) through a circular doorway into a second courtyard where a huge image of Buddha loomed against a sodden sky, dwarfing the row of rooms set apart for human habitation. There was something disconcerting to Papa in the blankness of the stone eyeballs, unperturbed by sun, rain, or intruders from across the sea.

The room they entered was formally arranged with four benches and a low carved teakwood table on which a charcoal brazier glowed, invitingly. The two men exchanged polite amenities. As their hands hovered across the warmth between them, Papa felt an unusual diffidence. His own hands, strong and well-proportioned by Western standards, showed lines and bulging veins that seemed almost crude in comparison with the diminutive smoothness of his host's. Another apprentice brought steaming bowls of tea, and soon the venerable abbot entered and engaged in conversation so friendly that Papa felt quite at home.

There was a twinkle in the eye of his little fellow traveler when he brought in steaming towels with which to wipe off the grime of the road. Did he mean to reassure Papa that he would tell no tales of the foreigner's previous condescension to a mere apprentice? Papa could only guess at what went on behind the heavy-lidded eyes of these Chinese.

"*Shang shan pai fu?*" the abbot asked. "Are you climbing the mountain to worship Buddha?"

"I have come to see the famous mountain, but I am a follower of *Ye Su.*"

The old man nodded. "I have heard of this foreign philosopher."

"His birthplace was nearer to your country than to mine," Papa said, smiling. "In fact, he came to minister to all people under the sun."

The abbot stroked his beard thoughtfully. "So Kung Fu Tze spoke of himself. But our Buddha was more concerned with inner serenity. It is said that the pilgrims who are fortunate enough to see Buddha's glory at the top of this mountain will most assuredly die happy."

"But I am more concerned with living happily," Papa said. "*Ye Su* also revealed his glory, but he charged his friends to say nothing about it because at the foot of that mountain were the sick and the needy to be ministered to."

"It is true that most of the devout are concerned only with themselves. Last week a pilgrim jumped from the precipice above us and fell to his death. Most unlucky for us! Why did he plague us so? We will be hard put to it to keep away the evil spirits now."

"We believe that *Ye Su* paid mankind's debt to the Supreme and lifts us from the curse of any malignant foe."

"So? And how do you buy his favor? Does he like incense and the sound of the gong, as does Buddha?"

Papa shook his head. "No one can buy his favor. He requires only that you admit your need."

The brown eyes narrowed speculatively. "It is too easy," he said after a pause and rose to his feet. "The road to righteousness is a struggle. That is why we have our sacred mountains."

Papa bowed. "True, true. Righteousness is difficult of human attainment. In fact, it's impossible. But believe me, it *can* be received as a gift from the Eternal." He reached into his portfolio and brought out a Gospel of John. "Please accept this from your unworthy guest. Perhaps sometime your excellency would investigate more about this *Ye Su?*"

From the gate below they heard the loud complaints of Papa's "old man," Jacob. "*Ai, ya,* I'm soaked to the skin and I've walked over fifty li. Who wants money of the foreign devil?"

The abbot accepted the small book and tapped long fingernails against the binding. A slow smile lit his face. "You made him strive for his wages, and though he curses you, he respects you. You see how necessary it is to *earn* one's righteousness—not receive it as a gift, as you say."

A roar of laughter from the lower court piqued their curiosity. Not wanting to miss the banter, they moved toward the clamor. But it quickly subsided at their appearance. Feudalistic attitudes had been maintained for centuries in China. Papa turned toward the abbot, and this time he was smiling significantly. "Ah, but the relationship between master and servant is not like that between friends, is it? Our *Ye Su* said we can receive virtue only by grace. And he said henceforth he could call us friends, not master and servant."

At the table Jacob thawed quickly. They were all seated, two long benches of priests, apprentices, and transients in a room blackened by the smoke of ages. Servants laid before them steaming bowls of *mien-tiao* (noodles) and four kinds of vegetables cooked without animal oil, but remarkably tasty.

From his room, later, Papa heard the little priest ordered to his business and the chant of his prayers before the huge image of Buddha in the outer court. Rolling in with the thick evening mists, the sounds of the gong were enchanting, at first measured and slow, then faster and lighter until the sound seemed to melt into the distance.

Rain was falling again at daylight, but Papa was eager to be off. The climb now began in earnest. After three miles he halted for breakfast at Wang Sen Tze, the "monastery of a myriad years." While breakfast was being prepared, he wandered about the domed temple, noting a huge bronze elephant which he judged to be some ten centuries old. He stooped to examine the fitted joints in the molded statuary and to look for some trace of its origin. It appeared to be Hindu, but how had it been brought across the great Himalaya Mountains? The thrust of its great legs and the brandishing trunk must have reflected the intrepid spirit of its creator.

The journey resumed, the travelers climbed higher and higher, ascending one peak only to see another beyond. Sometimes they lost their hard-earned altitude and then found themselves buying it back with interest. Papa bought a pilgrim's staff for about two cents. It was gracefully carved with a hand of Buddha holding a lotus bud.

About noon they heard the unmistakable sound of descending footsteps above them. "How goes it up there?" Jacob called but received no answer. When three men hove into view there was still little communication. One of them limped horribly. Papa wondered how he'd made the ascent in the first place. There was no evidence of triumph in their expressions.

"Did you see Buddha's glory?" Jacob asked.

One of them, a man with a broad, pock-marked face and sagging eyelids, grunted something unintelligible.

"What did he say?" Papa asked.

Jacob laughed uproariously. "He say he can see much more with half the trouble when he smoke opium."

Some places were so steep, the steps so shallow and far apart, that the pilgrims could look neither up nor back lest they lose their balance. But the beauty of the forest held Papa's interest. "It's lovelier than anything I've ever seen," he wrote in his journal.

They dined at twelve-thirty. "It's as hard to get my man past an eating place as a mule by a fodder shack, though it's a good thing he can't read my mind, for he'd think I was cursing him. Any implied resemblance to an animal will anger a Chinese more than anything else."

"We'll not come to another food shop before night," the coolie pleaded. The foliage over the entrance to the shop was so dense that it was hard to believe it was early afternoon. The teahouse itself clung precariously to the side of the mountain, and from it Papa could see a waterfall plunging to a silvery death a thousand feet below.

He lost interest in the temples they passed at frequent intervals, preferring the unspoiled foliage and magnificent views. Whenever he spied a flower new to him, he'd press it carefully between the pages of his Chinese Bible as a surprise for Maggie. Once they came upon a pair of golden pheasants, scratching about in the leaves and not the least disturbed by the passing pilgrims.

"How I wish you and the children could have seen them," he wrote Maggie. "The male has rich blue feathers shading to the purest gold all down the body and into deep red mixed with gold and blue in the tail feathers. A more brilliant bird never lived. And he looks as if he knows it."

Shortly after lunch the straggling company of pilgrims passed the snow line. Papa's attention was drawn to an old woman who leaned hard on her staff, gasping a prayer to Buddha at every step of her tightly-bound feet. *"Oh, Mi teh fu!"*

Papa shook his head. "She looks as if she'll hardly make it!" he said to Jacob.

Jacob was full of admiration, not pity. "For this suffering, she'll go quickly through purgatory when she dies!"

Papa made a mental note of a comment for his journal. *She is one of thousands who will pass this way. Is it an idle dream to wish they could know the truth that would set them free from this bondage?*

At three o'clock, and nine thousand feet above sea level, he and two other pilgrims passed through the clouds, but no one had breath for conversation. From their new vantage point they could see the clouds float lightly up a hill and crawl over it. Below, through rents in the misty blanket, he glimpsed parts of the three rivers flowing east and southward. A fourth also had its source hereabout, accounting for the name given the province: Szechwan, Four Rivers. Before them, toward Tibet, lay mountains, mountains, and more mountains.

Sleet began to fall and made the climb still more difficult. The old man fell far behind. Only fir trees and snow surrounded them. Papa's knees were trembling and he longed to stop and console feet that were icy in wet socks and sandals, but he dared not. At last, through trees that rattled with ice, the temple materialized. Called Chen Fu Tze, it perched on the brink of a precipice twelve thousand feet above sea level.

The sound of a gong underscoring the thin chant of the priest was their only welcome. They made their way to the kitchen, where the fire in a stone stove sent its fumes to escape where they would.

The priest, a cadaverous-looking fellow with a wispy beard, returned soon and served tea. Old Jacob finally made his appearance and sat mute, looking at Papa reproachfully, as if blaming him for the size of the mountain, the weather, and life's miseries in general.

After a hot supper, Papa ventured briefly into the darkness to peer down the long trail they'd come. He could see only a few lights far down in the foothills. The wind howled about the tip-tilted eaves as if resenting even this encroachment of civilization upon the domain of the elements.

"In the morning, there is where you can see Buddha's glory," the priest said. Papa was startled at the voice just behind him, for he hadn't been aware that he'd been followed.

"Buddha's glory? I've heard much about Buddha's glory. Could it be the rainbow seen from above the clouds?"

"*Ai*, it's worth many times the labor of the climb, and people die happy when they've seen the glorious colors that bless the earth below!" In a high, nasal voice the old priest launched into a long rambling monologue. Talking all the while, he led Papa back into the smoky communal room, pointing out yellowed inscriptions brushed on ancient rice paper. Papa had the feeling that his host was more impressed by the famous people who'd come to see the phenomenon than by the supposed manifestation of Buddha's presence. On and on the priest talked, charmed apparently by the sound of his own voice. "Here have come all the great men of the earth, since before the T'ang dynasty. Only last month a cousin of the Empress Dowager honored us with his presence. Handsomely the visitor rewarded the attendants, too!"

Papa didn't miss the significance of that remark. Vaguely he remembered that the T'ang dynasty had predated Charlemagne in Europe. He wondered sleepily how long he could feign attention, tired as he was from the climb up the mountain. He was glad nothing more was expected from him than an occasional grunt. It was close to midnight when he finally extricated himself.

In the morning there was only sleet and snow and no Buddha's glory to be seen!

"Stay a few days," the *ho-hsiang* (priest) advised him. "You deserve the reward after the pilgrimage."

But Papa was in a hurry to be homeward bound. The virtues of a contemplative spirit were all right in their place, but this spell of weather might last for weeks. And the chance of being rewarded by Buddha's appearance seemed more than offset by the certain punishment of being cooped up with this garrulous old gnome. Actually his grey garments and wispy beard were weirdly like something from a dead but unburied past, and Papa found himself hungry for contact with the present. He'd found a sample of what he'd come after. If rewards such as these were all that Buddhism had to offer, there should be a great readiness for Christianity all across the far reaches of this vast country.

Papa made a mistake in asking how much the night's lodging would be.

"Oh, I make no charge," his host said.

Feeling sorry for the old fellow in his lonesome existence, Papa offered him three hundred cash—double what he'd paid for previous lodging. He was taken aback at the look of disgust on the priest's face. Was he offended by the offer of "filthy lucre"? If so, here was a new kind of Chinese.

The priest held up the chain of cash and dropped it disdainfully on the pavement. His hands looked like the talons of a bird of prey. "Six hundred cash at least!" he screamed. "Do you take me for a fool?"

Papa had a headache and was eager to be off. He was in no mood for dickering. He settled for four hundred and fifty. "I hope old Jacob doesn't get grandiose ideas about my finances," he muttered to himself. He determined to fast away his headache. By two o'clock, when he stopped for breakfast, he hadn't a vestige of pain and noted the fact in his journal.

He'd been tramping for twenty days the night he decided to see how far he could walk in a day. Unfortunately, Jacob had lost the matches and none could be bought. Papa could tell the early hours only by striking a match and peering at his watch, and he knew he must start well before dawn. He decided to keep a candle burning, lighting one when the other guttered low. *The very time I need a good night's rest, I must do on fitful naps. Oddly enough I dreamed of the bully of my boyhood community in one of those short naps. Why such a dream? Was it because I was anticipating the trial of my strength? Who can say?* Thus he noted his morning comments in the daily account of his activities.

At five o'clock he was ready to start, but Jacob was slow beyond anything he'd ever seen. In vain he blustered. *There is little to recommend him but what he is not*, Papa wrote. *To think I chose him because, of all his fellows, he seemed the most eager and needy!*

The city gate was closed and Papa banged on the ancient wood with his cane, calling again and again to the gatekeeper. "Daylight is already a half-hour gone. Do you intend to sleep all day?"

The keeper responded in grunts. It was hard to tell whether he really intended to open the gate or not. Finally he came out, yawning and scratching his naked torso. As he threw open the gate, Papa was accosted by four of the more aggressive beggars who huddled in wretchedness against the wall. "Save the dying," they pleaded, plucking at his garment. Papa gave the gatekeeper some cash. "Get them a large bowl of millet," he said.

It was one of those dark days when even the sun seemed too lazy to rise. Soon the heavy clouds began to drizzle. The roads bordering emerald rice fields were slick. Early in the day they left the last of the lovely bamboo groves swaying in lacy dignity. The villages were getting larger and less frequent. Pigs and children, goats and farmers' wives, swarmed by the roadside, and bent figures straightened in the fields to watch them pass. At about eight o'clock they came to the banks of the Min and turned on to the great road leading from Kaiting to Chengtu. They rested briefly at an eating shop, where they ate breakfast. The humidity gave a nauseating emphasis to the heavy smells of garlic, manure, and drying hemp. Papa finished first and started on ahead of his man.

He strode through two important cities, resting forty minutes for dinner. At four o'clock his feet felt like lead, but he kept on placing one before the other in dogged determination. Long since, Jacob had learned the futility of complaint and had settled down to a stolidity that was equally maddening.

"Another thirty li and we'll call it a day," Papa said. His words failed to make so much as a ripple in the pool of sullen silence. *He's making sure of a good remuneration when we separate in Chengtu,* Papa surmised. *Would it do any good to rest a little? I don't think I could get started again.*

The high wall of a good-sized town on the horizon became his goal, but exasperatingly enough it seemed to retreat before them. Finally, as night fell, they staggered into the first inn they came to, and in five minutes Papa had spread out his bedding on the *k'ang* (brick stove-bed) and thrown himself down exhausted. He'd walked a total of forty-three miles. "If anyone wants to beat that, he's welcome to the cake, if any. I'm done." So he described the ordeal in his journal the next morning, adding a hopeful note about his loved ones. "Three more days and we'll be in Chengtu, where I'll hire a mule for the long trek north to the Yellow River and across to Shantung. Maggie knows I'll be staying with Mr. Grainger of the China Inland Mission, and there'll be a letter from her," he wrote hopefully.

There was. It mattered little that it was four weeks old. It was still news and it was good.

Jacob was quick to sense his employer's elation and to expect a generous settlement. With the eager brown eyes before him, Papa forgot his former irritation. He laid an affectionate hand on the bony shoulder. After all, they'd been through a lot together. A less loyal soul might have deserted him en route. For once there was no dickering. "Remember, whenever you need a friend, there is always the Eternal, ready to listen to the prayer I taught you."

Jacob grinned, showing all his snaggleteeth. *"Hao pung-yo, shi, shi,"* he said, nodding vigorously. (Good friend, yes, yes.)

Mr. Grainger was anxious to hear Papa's impressions of the trip. The China Inland Mission—of which Dr. Hudson Taylor was the respected head—had long stood for many of the principles Papa had espoused and was known for courage and self-sacrifice far beyond the call of duty. The two missionaries had climbed the abutment to the city wall and stopped to admire the view. For the moment they were the only figures against the great circular sweep of the grey brick wall. Two men of equal height and in Chinese dress were not likely to draw a crowd quickly. The rampart was some forty feet wide and beautifully paved with tile. Just below them stretched acres and acres of grey-tiled roofs, interspersed with an unusual abundance of trees. Through the evening haze they could barely discern the outlines of the west gate and two or three pagodas like exclamation points, haughty and inhospitable. The narrow streets were like veins through which coursed an endless stream of blue-clad humans.

"Close your eyes and listen," Mr. Grainger said.

Papa was standing on tiptoe to look through the battlements toward the great reach of green fields that melted in the distance to the blue mountains he'd left so recently. He'd never thought to block off one sense in order to augment another.

Mr. Grainger laughed at the incredulous expression that showed in Papa's face. That which bore in on him was a strange medley of human sounds, caught and amplified, much as the heartbeat is by the stethoscope. It was as if he held a conch shell to his ear and listened to the pent vastness of an ocean. Dimmed and merged by the distance and hemmed in by the mammoth circle of wall were the wails of those who mourned, the cries of vendors, the laughter of children, the steady clack, clack of a loom, the braying of an ass, and through it all, the pulsing life breath of a teeming Chinese city.

Papa shook his head in bewilderment. "It gets you, doesn't it?"

Mr. Grainger, an Englishman, was more precise in expressing himself. "You mean China's vastness is enough to overwhelm our missionary endeavor?"

Papa nodded. They were now striding along, anxious to make the quarter-circuit of the city before dark.

"If we think we can change China, yes. Unfortunately, that's what the average English churchman expects. At a distance, everything is en masse. But close up, nothing is."

Again Papa nodded. "That's what I keep telling myself. You can't beat the Lord's imagery, can you? *I will make you fishers of men.* The time may come when you can fish with a seine, but not now. It's a one-by-one affair." He laughed shortly. "Say, do you ever get discouraged?"

"Do I ever get discouraged?" Mr. Grainger snorted. "Am I ever otherwise?"

They walked on in silence for a while. "It's worse in the ports," Papa said, "where pressures from abroad have fostered the illusion that China is fast becoming Christian. After all, I can understand how the folks at home want to see some return for their money."

"Yes, but these illusions are fatal in our kind of work. The only antidote to discouragement is the bitter dose of truth: admit our human failures and count on Divine perfection in the over-all design. That's Dr. Hudson Taylor's pattern, and you know how God has blessed our mission."

Papa nodded. "I've talked with several who know of your work and that in Changsha. They all say your converts are *dao-di* (lit., "to the bottom," or genuine)."

Mr. Grainger laughed. "At least there has been so little monetary inducement that not many are drawn in by filthy lucre. But it isn't easy to live like the Chinese—look there, what's that?"

Ahead of them a man struggled on the pavement. At least it looked like a man, but his head was bleeding where he'd apparently been bumping it mercilessly on the pavement, and a thick froth dripped from distorted lips. They ran to help him.

"Let's turn him over so he won't tear his face any more on the stones." The convulsions stopped shudderingly and the figure fell back as if dead. Papa groped for a pulse.

"Still alive. Is there a doctor in the city?"

Mr. Grainger shook his head. They looked about them helplessly. For once there were not even any stragglers near at hand. "If we could get him to the house, Mamie might know what to do for him. She's had some training as a nurse. It looks like epilepsy to me."

"I think we could manage to carry him, don't you? We could make a sling of our hands, so?"

"Do you realize how far we've come? That's out of the question, anyway, because his family would be certain we'd kidnaped him."

"Then I'll stay here and you send men with a litter."

"You can't do that either. They'd blame you for it. There have been riots over less."

They eased the fellow closer to the wall, and Mr. Grainger covered him with his sleeveless outer garment. He was little but skin and bones. Fine drops of rain were beginning to slant through the dusk.

They hurried home and sent two men with a litter.

But the men returned empty-handed. "No man there," they insisted.

"They're lying," Papa said. "I'll go back and show them."

Mr. Grainger questioned the men closely. "They've been to the spot all right. Perhaps his family has come for him. In any case, we'll have to pay these men off."

That night, Papa couldn't sleep. Like the points of a harrow dragging through his thoughts, the man's plight tore against his conscience. The rooster in the adjoining courtyard was beginning his matutinal workout. Papa turned on his stomach, and the hard bed creaked under his movement. "Dear Lord," he muttered wretchedly, "forgive me. I didn't do what you did for me. You *came* for me." Only then did he fall asleep.

CHAPTER 4

Return
To
Eden

Manly and Margaret romped noisily on the veranda overlooking the crowded street leading to the north gate of the native city of Shanghai. Between them and the city wall a moat afforded an odoriferous extension of commerce, with barges and houseboats crowding the banks. The foreign houses—Papa's and the larger one occupied by the widow of the venerated pioneer, Matthew T. Yates—were enclosed by a high wall, the two compounds being separated by a smaller one.

There was much else that linked the two compounds. Manly's middle name was Yates, in honor of the old gentleman who had initiated Baptist work in Shanghai and seen it through the lean years of the War Between the States and the contemporaneous Tai Ping Rebellion in China. Dr. Yates had, before his death, suffered a stroke that had altered his face considerably. The first time two-year-old Manly had seen his old friend following his illness, he ran to greet him and stopped short, bursting into tears. The old man and the child wept together.

When he died, the whole Herring family had felt the loss keenly. Dr. Yates had been like a father to Papa in a land where paternalism is not taken lightly. They had talked often of the problems besetting the work and the pity of encroaching Westernism in its cruder forms in the ports. But Papa had no way of knowing that the old man's criticisms would be dismissed in the homeland as natural for the aged, while his own would bring forth harsher scrutiny from his fellows.

The noise welling up from the street drew the children to the railing to watch the flow of traffic below. Rickshawmen clamored for elbow room.

"Lend light, lend light," they shrilled.

Burden-bearers grunted a steady "*hoi-hoi*" to the whisper of feet on the hard-packed clay. The outcries of a vendor or professional beggar beat at intervals against the grey brick walls and store fronts. A half-dozen donkeys picked their way through the throng, their long ears flicking stolidly to left and right with small concern for the oaths rained upon them by irate drivers in the rear. The packs on the small beasts reached almost across the narrow street in places.

Amah was seated cross-legged in a strip of thin September sunlight near her charges. She was making shoes obviously designed for her favorite, George, because of the "red-tiger" uppers. She pushed her needle at even intervals through the thick layers of cloth with a wooden ellipsoid held in the palm of her hand.

"Not climb so high, Elder brother. *Mei-mei* follow you and get big hurt. Remember what 'Grandma Yates' tell you?"

"Shucks, I can climb twice as high as little sister, and she'd better not try to follow me, 'cause she's only a girl!"

Margaret rocked her jointless wooden doll, softened only by its cumbersome clothes. "My Papa come home tomorrow," she crooned.

Manly gave a shout. "Here he is at the gate, now!"

He slithered from his perch and raced through the house and into the yard, darting around the two coolies, who'd lowered their burdens and were looking about curiously at the foreign antics. In one bound, he hurled himself into his father's arms.

"I should have known you'd get home before you said." Maggie beamed as the servants gathered from both compounds.

Only the baby held back.

"Don't you remember your Papa at all, George?"

The coolies gazed in patent amusement at the foreigners with their strange kissing and hugging. Well they knew that the pay-off would be generous now.

By lamplight that night, Papa littered the bedroom with his travel-weary belongings. "How good it is to be back!" he said for the tenth time to Maggie. "I'm afraid I've lost all my illusions about the virtues of the Chinese race."

"*You've* had illusions?" Maggie said teasingly. "I wouldn't call them that!"

"What would you call them?"

"Perhaps prejudices would be a better word. Only, most people seem to think prejudgments are all slanted in one direction. Don't most of us have a lot of romantic nonsense that has to be dissipated by reality?" Maggie held up a bedraggled sock in quest of its mate, and grinned. "Just about everything, everywhere—including ideas—needs sorting at times. Right?"

"But I have to fight the feeling that every Chinese—that every *human* is—is a rascal!"

"So what? Just so you're fighting it." Again Maggie's smile showed the rapport between them. "Perhaps you'll never be as comfortable spiritually as you were when you graduated from the seminary. You're not letting a close-up view bother you, are you? After all, the Bible says it plainly. *There is none righteous, no not one.* Saved sinners have a way of ignoring that detail sometimes."

"And being merely saved sinners, we have only to concern ourselves with being honest? Thank you, Mrs. Herring; you're better than bifocals any day." Papa lifted water-warmed feet from the basin before him and toweled deliberately.

"How do you feel about asking for a transfer inland now?" Maggie asked.

"I'll never be satisfied anywhere else."

"Would you be happy accepting Crawford's and Bostick's invitation to Shantung?"

Papa shook his head. "Not if it means that I have to be a separatist." He stroked his moustache thoughtfully. "The Crawfords are fine folk. You'd love 'em. He has a long white beard down to here, and that makes a hit with the natives, of course. But that tract he wrote, *Churches to the Front*, puts things a bit too baldly for the folks at home, it seems to me. I talked at great length to Bostick and pleaded with him not to resign from the Board until I have a chance to put matters before the brethren in Richmond when we get our furlough. But he thinks Crawford's method is the only solution." Papa sat back in his chair and linked his hands behind his head. "No, Chengtu is the field that really draws me. The people are industrious and the land fertile."

"Getting in to Chengtu would be harder than going up the Grand Canal to Shantung, wouldn't it?"

Papa nodded absently. "Life would be a bit rough—in either direction, west or north."

Maggie dropped to the hassock beside Papa, leaning elbows on the arm of his chair and cupping her chin soberly. One slender finger played over softly rounded lips. "I wish Dr. Yates were still alive and we could talk things over with him. He wouldn't approve of branching off into this—this so-called 'Gospel Mission' either, d'ye think?"

Papa leaned forward to examine a callus with exaggerated concern. "And yet, you know, if the Board won't take time to learn the facts of life out here, the missionary is driven to that very kind of action. After all, few Baptists have as great a stake in this matter as the Crawfords. They supported themselves completely during the War Between the States. Even now, Bostick says they'll eat the last of the canned milk long after it has soured rather than waste it." He rose and carried the basin to the washstand to empty it. "To invest one's life is—well, it means much more than merely to invest one's money, as people at home are doing."

"At least you've done your part to get the facts across. Isn't it wonderful that your articles are so well received at home? Several letters in the *Recorder* said they made folks feel they'd been here themselves."

Papa looked pleased. "We'll just have to keep the issues clear ourselves," and he ticked them off on his fingers. "First, we can't expect to deliver Christians in exchange for dollars here, any more than in America. Second, we should be allowed to dress as the Chinese do—at least in the interior. Third, to be truly democratic, the laymen at home—not just the members of the Board—should feel the burden of responsibility for the work. Direct support by the churches seems to be the answer to this problem, and I don't feel that it should fracture the denominational machinery to try it, at least. Fourth, it's up to us to communicate not only the assets but also the liabilities of the work. Why, the pap that's fed the public in the name of missions is downright insultin'. An idiot would know it couldn't be true."

Maggie giggled. "Speaking of pap, do you remember that write-up about Liu of the Plumtree district?"

"That rascal?" Papa grunted. "Hobson should have known better than to send off stuff like that! To read it, you'd think the Gospel was getting out so fast the whole province would be converted in a matter of months."

Maggie nodded. "Seems Liu and the printer had worked up quite a racket, first distributing the literature and then gathering it again for redistribution, meanwhile pocketing the money. You can imagine the general chagrin!" Her fingers had been rapidly plaiting her hair. She flicked the braid over her shoulder and slipped into bed.

Papa paced the floor. "No wonder the natives laugh at us and think Christianity is synonymous with stupidity." He stopped by the bed, and his face softened as he looked down at Maggie. "Think you would be happy living a rugged pioneer life in the hinterland?"

Maggie smiled and reached up to pat him playfully. "You need to hear it often, don't you?" Her brown eyes sobered. "But it's still true: *Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.*"

Papa turned the wick low in the lamp and blew gently. The darkness was a palpable tenderness between them. "Only drawback to Heaven," he murmured as the bed creaked, "is the fact that there'll be no night there."

By Christmas time, Papa felt a new urgency to press for a furlough, which would be coming due in the spring anyway. Maggie was pregnant, and everywhere he turned the unresolved issues regarding the work baffled him. As Mission treasurer, he'd just finished a careful accounting of the year's funds. He'd already applied for furlough and wished to turn the books over to Brother Tatum in good shape.

But when the appropriation came through it was with the stipulation that Mrs. Bryan and her family return because of her ill health. The others were needed too greatly on the field.

The terse announcement from the Foreign Mission Board arrived in the mail just two days before Christmas. The letter trembled visibly in Papa's hand as he finished reading it aloud. He jerked to his feet and began to pace the floor. "Four months ago she *was* sick. But the picture has changed now. Besides, how do they expect me to get much done with these matters still hanging fire? Sometimes I think they're afraid to face some of the facts I intend to tell them!"

Maggie shed a lapful of socks as she darted to catch George from venturing too close to the grate fire. Her face was flushed from the exertion. "Patience was never one of your virtues, David. As for getting things done, I'd never say that laziness was one of your vices, either. The only quarrel I have with you is that, while other missionaries are telling of their exploits, you modestly hide your light under a bushel. Who do you suppose has been given credit for the discipleship of that young fellow Chwang, whom you led to the Lord?"

"One soweth and another reapeth. You should know that," Papa said. "And patience is greatly overrated, at least in China. Now you take that child. If a puppy can be trained to stay in bounds, so can he. I'll never agree that he isn't as smart!" Papa gave him a brisk spank. "You stay away from that fire, do you hear me?"

"There," Papa continued, after the wails had been silenced by a still sterner admonition. "There, see how quickly it's over when you are firm enough?"

Maggie smiled. "There's much to be said in the matter of timing, however. By the way, remember the Christmas party here tonight for the children? You'd better take Manly and Margaret to the foreign city for a few toys."

Later that evening when the guests began arriving, Papa went upstairs to struggle into his Santa Claus gear.

No one conversant with modern Santa Claus would have recognized him with his face blacked, wearing a tall beaver hat, and sporting the long-unused foreign clothes.

"Why black your face?" Maggie asked on a hurried trip upstairs to check on George, asleep in the small room adjoining the bedroom where Papa capered before the angled mirror over the washstand.

"Why not?" Papa countered. "The children know he's fictitious. Who says what Santa Claus looks like, anyway? Might as well give them the benefit of many cultures." He looked down at her mischievously. "How do you like my beard?"

A little later, he knocked at the front door.

"Well, if it isn't Santa Claus!" Maggie greeted him. The children stood back in awe. The mothers, seated decorously around the room, clucked in astonishment. Here was an evident departure from their usual celebrations. Missionaries in Shanghai were a mite self-conscious about their efforts to Westernize the Orient. "What will the servants say?" one matron whispered to another, the lines in her face as stiff and uncompromising as the stays in her bodice.

Manly was the first to recover his aplomb. He went gravely to Papa and shook his hand. "How do you do, Mr. Santa Claus?"

Papa and Maggie exchanged glances. "Trust a child," he whispered, as he bent his tall frame to distribute the gifts laid under the tree. Soon the children were opening presents, trying out harmonicas and horns, and admiring the Chinese lanterns hung festively about the room. Santa danced a jig that could have come as well from the

Scottish Highlands as from the cotton fields of Dixie.

"Mamma, where's Papa?" Manly rushed up to his mother in dismay. "Oh, I know! He went upstairs; I'll get him."

"Why, Manly, this is your papa."

Manly stopped short in disbelief, his face betraying his wounded dignity.

"I thought you knew me, son." Papa reached toward him. Apparently it wasn't a mere matter of the unaccustomed foreign garb: the foundations of basic trust between them were threatened.

Maggie jerked off Papa's beard. "There, Manly. See?"

But Manly hid his face in a new mortification. "Mamma, don't." His sobs turned to shaky laughter only after finding the familiar refuge of Papa's arms.

In January word came from the Bryans in Chinkiang that Mrs. Bryan had decided she wouldn't, under any conditions, return to the homeland without her husband. Papa hurried to the adjoining compound to talk the matter over with Mrs. Yates. She was virtually retired from the work because of her age, but as senior member of the mission her opinion carried weight.

"I don't know," she said thoughtfully. Her prim bearing was faintly regal, perhaps because of the tight-waisted bodice and bustles she always wore. Papa had to admit she wouldn't look right in Chinese dress, but then, no one was after her to change either her attitudes or her attire. She motioned him to a seat. "It's true, since you came over on the very same boat with the Bryans, Mrs. Herring seems to have as much right to a furlough now as anyone. But the Board had reasons to think you men should stay on the job here. Women—well, we aren't so important, you know, since we can't vote or anything in the mission meetings."

Mr. Tatum, too, was noncommittal. Only Bryan agreed that Papa's furlough was due and he needed to see the Board in person before the rifts became any wider. "Why don't you finance your own passage? I could come to your place while you are gone. The work upriver can be supervised from Shanghai about as well. My wife needs to be nearer a doctor anyway."

Papa set about figuring ways and means. If he stretched a point and drew his March salary early, he could just barely muster up the funds. "After all," he told Maggie, "we've been drawing only about sixty per cent of what we came out on, and I feel it's due me, all right."

With the decision made, the Herring household became a maelstrom of preparation. Their meagre belongings had to be packed away for a future that was anybody's guess. The Pekinese must be given a new home, and Manly consoled for the loss of his pet. Throughout the days of anticipation, Amah wept bitterly and openly before the children.

"We'll be back," Manly chirruped.

"But Second son will forget me!" she wailed.

When the actual time of leave-taking came, Papa decided to let her go along to the jetty with the family. She clung to George on the rickshaw ride through the crowded lanes of the native city and out upon the broad Bund.

Even to Papa and Maggie there was something overwhelmingly impersonal about the coldly efficient buildings of the foreign concession that stared down at them as they glided through the wet streets. The windows, like glass-lidded eyes peering through the sleet, were horribly indifferent to such human pangs as coolie-chilblains and amah-heartaches. Seven years before they'd felt none of this. Papa sighed. "We need a new perspective, I guess," he muttered to Maggie as they drew up on the wharf. He pressed money into Amah's hand and took the baby. "Buy yourself a gift to remind you of the children."

Amah smiled, but her wails rose again as she watched them mount the gangplank.

As the tender hove to leeward of the towering liner, the passengers gazed up at the swaying ladder in awe. Was there no other means of reaching the promised land of America? Papa guided his family up, one at a time, and then found himself in demand to help other timid passengers. On deck, finally, the travelers—some Yankees, some Canadians—seemed to share his gusto. America, land of forests, freedom, and friendships! Garden of Eden! Someone started singing either "God Save the Queen" or "America." For the moment no one seemed to care about the fine points of geographical boundaries, and the jumble of words made a weird sort of sense in the rush of fellowship that apparently flows spontaneously aboard ships.

The merging of nationalities during the next three weeks was quietly accepted by the children, but Manly eyed the Japanese steward gravely. "Why don't we talk to him in Chinese?" he asked his parents. Instinctively he resented "pidgin English" as strictly for the birds.

Papa always woke early, and on shipboard he made no exception. Two days before they were to dock, he slipped out of the cabin without rousing the children and strode the deck alone, his imagination quickened by the cold wash of air and sea about him. There was something exciting about the movement of the elements through the sombre dawn—so little disturbed by man's boasted ingenuity. What lay ahead of him? Could he get his convictions across to the Board? He was pretty sure of popular support on the individual church level, but according to what he read in the denominational papers, there was a new climate at mission headquarters in Richmond. It never crossed his mind that the decision to take his furlough now would be construed as insubordination. Not when he was driven by a sense of urgency for the work that made it impossible to remain snugly (and obediently) in a harbor, gathering barnacles. Not when all the weight of Baptist history pointed significantly toward the rugged individualism of an Adoniram Judson, or a Luther Rice, or a Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

For one thing, Virginia had contributed much to the sturdy spirit of independence in the denomination. Several Baptist pastors had once been imprisoned in the state for their refusal to bow to edicts of the state-established church. Virginia had sent out the first foreign missionaries under a newly established Board in 1845. The very name of Richmond represented all that was gallant in a dead, but not forgotten, Confederacy. Papa halted his march at the prow and braced himself against the wind, watching the water curl away from the great steel blade. His hands tightened on the rail. No, he had nothing to fear in the location of the Southern Baptist Mission Board.

But what was this climate so heatedly discussed by the Shantung missionaries? Were they right in saying that the leaders had ambitions like those of Caesar? And was the fear of public opinion muzzling a press that should always be free in order to bulwark any democracy? Papa shook his head. He knew his fellows. It would be a sad day for Baptists when they gave up their cherished heritage of free debate. Outsiders might think it inappropriate in religious life, just as Europeans might question the hysteria of United States elections, but both groups were quick to applaud any freedoms thus won.

He remembered a sentence of Dr. Crawford's: "A man who is born the second time is born honest." That was the important thing to remember. One's individual integrity was the only thing that mattered, and on that basis unity was forever possible at any place and at any time.

Papa knew well the divergent opinions of the two parties within the denomination. He also knew where he stood in his own mind on the issues they represented. He was closer to those known as "Landmarkists," although he resented being so labeled. The term had grown out of a sermon preached by a prominent minister and based on the injunction in Proverbs against removing "the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set." Closely he'd followed the articles that had appeared in the Baptist press, almost as many on one side of the controversy as on the other. The "Regulars" claimed to be for progress, for newer methods, for tightening the organizational machinery, and for preserving the union of Baptists.

Papa wasn't dismayed by the conflict of opinions. He knew that neither party had a monopoly on the truth. And he knew that both parties were for progress—according to their lights. Where there was life there was conflict—in religion as in politics—indeed wherever fallible human beings were involved. Though he didn't go along with all Crawford and the Landmarkists believed in, he resented any pressure toward conformity. Much better than organizational loyalty was the more nebulous unity of spirit—the recognition of common ultimate aims. Who could tell? Such an attitude might even have eliminated the late conflict between the states. After all, most people on either side of the Mason-Dixon line were desirous of justice!

He couldn't have known where conviction ended and dogmatism began; but for that matter, could anyone else? He wished either Dr. H. H. Harris, the president of the Foreign Mission Board, or Henry A. Tupper, the corresponding secretary, had included China in his tour of mission fields. But China was still a hemisphere away from most Southern Baptists, in spite of accelerated voyages across the Pacific. About all he could hope for was a hearing on his views. And there, he prayed, he'd be able to give a good account.

Papa smiled as Manly appeared beside him and slipped a hand into his father's.

"Mamma wants you," he said, as they moved down the deck. He glanced up soberly at Papa. "Sometimes you look so—so stern, Papa. I like you better when you smile!"

Papa altered his steps to match those of the little boy. "Perhaps I like myself better that way, too," he said. "Only, some things you can't smile at, you know."

Manly engineered a double hop that again fractured the rhythm. "Oh, well," he said. "You can fix that. You can fix just about everything, can't you, Papa?"

Papa laughed. "You know what I'm about to conclude, son? Things may not always be as I'd have them, but then—they might not be any better if they were! Let's try to remember that, shall we?"

On the wharf in Vancouver, Manly objected in vigorous Chinese when a Negro porter attempted to lift the baggage over which he stood guard.

The porter threw back his head and laughed uproariously. "Here's a boy don't know how to talk a word of English," he announced to all and sundry.

Manly flushed painfully. All his life he'd thought a man's language was basically related to his color. And now he was learning that it wasn't. There must be other differences, less obvious than that of color or language, that singled him out for a ridicule that he'd never known in China. He sighed. The problem seemed to be one that even Papa couldn't solve. He wasn't sure at all that he was going to like America.

All across the continent on the long train journey, Manly watched Papa's exuberance mount in inverse proportion to the size of the cities they passed—Chicago, Washington, Richmond, Rocky Mount, Burgaw. . . .

When the train wheezed to a stop and Papa handed his family down into the warm piny fragrance of a Carolina morning, Manly eyed the clustering villagers soberly. Apparently Papa had belonged to these horny-handed people long before he'd been Papa. One of them called him "Cousin Dave" and said he was mighty proud to see him again, as if he'd just come in from another world. Papa accepted the drawled greetings, the awkward handclasps, and the offer of two buggies to drive the family out to "Mist' Gee-awe-ge's."

The buggy wheels whispered in the sandy ruts and rippled the quiet shafts of sunlight slanting through bordering pines.

"It's so lonesome it scares me," Manly said.

Papa laughed, his glance lifting to the branches against the sky. "See how tall you can grow here in God's country?" They were slowing down to ford cypress-shaded Long Creek. The horses strained against the opposing bank and stopped briefly at a small unpainted chapel. Then they turned into a long grass-grown lane bordered with live oaks. Occasional clumps of Spanish moss swept lightly across the tops of the buggies.

"They say yore ma is worth more to 'em than ary preacher they've had," Mist' Croom called from the rear buggy, nodding significantly toward the little building.

"Her pa was the preacher they named Wells's Chapel after, you know." Papa slapped the reins and the children laughed gaily. "You can't go back on your raisin'."

Across the freshly turned earth of a bordering field, they caught sight of an overalled man, plowing.

"There he is," Papa said.

"Hello, Grandpa," Manly called.

Papa's eyes sought Maggie's. "We're home," he said.

CHAPTER 5

Well
Heeled
With
Tar

If Papa had ever entertained a thought of "going back on his raisin's," he shouldn't have returned to Pender County, North Carolina, where for a brief time the sound of guns over Fort Fisher had terrorized an otherwise uncomplicated childhood. For Grandma was never one to neglect a deep sense of heritage, whether cultural or religious.

The resemblance between mother and son was becoming even more apparent with Papa's growing maturity. She had the same steady blue eyes under finely arched brows. Her hair, only sparsely laced with grey, was pulled severely back to a dark brown bun that never seemed to be in disorder. Everything about her was strictly disciplined: the quick movements of her spare frame as she prepared for the day's churning, the vigilant inspection of the dasher, and the scrubbing of hands. Neither the crow's feet about her eyes nor the schooled line of her lips could hide a youthful eagerness seldom seen in her feminine contemporaries.

"Come second Sunday, we're all a-goin' over to your Uncle White Wells's," she said, punctuating her sentence with the rhythmic plunge of the churn dasher.

Grandpa set a brimming bucket of water on the wash-shelf and seated himself on the step. Years of wear and scrubbing had whitened the planks of the back porch to a pattern of veins like those of an old man's hand. In the clean-swept yard the children gathered piles of acorns and pine cones and traced pictures in the sand. His gaze caressed the children.

Grandpa was locally described as "easy-goin'." He had a way of throwing back his head and letting his laughter cascade through the neighborhood. An unusually florid complexion had once made him the butt of a visiting evangelist's scorn. Papa remembered the occasion indignantly. The evangelist had pointed straight at Grandpa and pronounced holy retribution on "that whisky-guzzlin' feller thar." Apparently Grandpa's embarrassed guffaw had been the best kind of answer—for his neighbors, emboldened and shocked at the misjudgment, had stood up in righteous and democratic indignation to set matters straight. No farmer in the neighborhood was held in better esteem. But the gentle stoop of his shoulders and the teasing drawl of his infrequent comments indicated his perfect willingness to let Grandma run things. That is what the neighbors meant by calling him "easy-goin'."

The soft spring air about the little group was filled with the quiet rustlings of the farm. Between the splashes of the churn could be heard the gossiping of chickens near the barn and the beat of a mocking bird's distant chatter. Aunt Bettie, the only one of the family still at home, sat across from Maggie, stringing beans. Maggie continued to rock George, although his eyes were long since closed. Papa's brother Johnnie lived on an adjoining farm with his small family. Jimmie was teaching in Wilmington. Ethel, too, was away, teaching school. Mabel, the youngest, was soon to return to the home from a visit to her oldest sister, Mollie, who had married a prominent farmer in Sampson County.

Papa's glance lingered on the broad sweep of the woods beyond the adjacent fields. "Doesn't it feel good not to be hemmed in by walls?" he asked Maggie. She nodded.

He slid the leather-bound Greek New Testament under his chair and nudged his mother's arm. "Here, let me," he said. "Remember how this was my job those years I was crippled?"

Ma smoothed her long, blue-checked apron with bony fingers unused to idleness. "The whole family's gatherin' to hear you preach, Dave Wells, though there ain't room enough for all the Wellses, let alone the Newkirks and Aldermans, the Boneys and the Herrings."

Grandpa exploded in sudden laughter. "Some preachers have a hard time rustlin' up a congregation. Your Ma's old man was smart. He begat 'em—a baker's dozen, no less!"

A twinkle remarkably like that in Papa's eye fought through the frigid glance Ma directed at Grandpa's irreverence. "Just the same, I'm not forgettin' how we all found refuge with my pa whilst you and my brothers wuz fightin' the Yanks. Do you remember it, Dave Wells?"

Papa nodded soberly. "We stood out by the well sweep and heard that slow pounding of the cannon twenty miles away, and I thought the end of the world had come!" He laughed. "I also remember skedaddling when Uncle White caught us carving our initials on the chapel, years later. Even on crutches I beat Ben and Jimmie."

"Why did you have to walk on crutches, Papa?" Manly reined in his stick horse just short of galloping under the house.

"Had a bone-felon in my ankle, son." Papa lifted his pants leg, exposing a long blue scar. "Guess I'd never have been a preacher if I'd been able to follow a plow."

Manly touched the dark area. "Is that tar, inside there?"

They all laughed. "That's not what we mean by being Tar Heels," Maggie said.

"Those splotches are where the doctor put charcoal in as a disinfectant," Papa explained.

"Did it hurt?" Manly asked.

"Not *that,* but the cupping—when he held a cup against the fire and slapped it to my ankle to draw out the infection—whew! *That* was something!"

Ma pushed her son away from the churn and began a slow rotation of the dasher to gather the butter. In spite of herself, her voice betrayed a nearly fatuous pride. "Doc and I couldn't fool him when he had to take him off the morphine. We were afraid he'd gotten the habit. But he saw through our scheme and quit. Just like that."

"You still haven't told the child what makes a Tar Heel," Grandpa interposed.

"Is the old kiln still there? Remember how I made my first school money strippin' turpentine and makin' tar?" Papa said. "I can *show* him what made a Tar Heel."

"You can't show him how them boys refused to retreat before the Yanks," Grandpa chuckled. "That wuz because they had tar on their heels, son. Don't you let anyone tell you diff'rent. You see, Manly, we jus' don't give in easy."

Manly's eyes widened. For the last few weeks he'd been treated to all the paternal lore his heart could desire. But sometimes he knew a strange bafflement. Life here, in the land of his father's birth, had somewhat the aspect of being in the public domain. Aunts and uncles were on hand for every Sunday dinner, anxious to shower their affection on the children. He was happy in his newfound acceptance and, by the same token, resentful of any suggestion that he'd ever been an alien.

"What do you call a goat in Chinese?" his Aunt Bettie asked him once after presenting him with a goat and wagon for his birthday.

"We aren't in China now," Manly replied with dignity. "We'll call him Billy."

One night Grandpa overheard his prayers and snickered at the request to "bless Billy."

Manly eyed him solemnly as he concluded his little rite. "Don't you pray for your mules?"

Grandpa laughed. "Not hardly."

"Well you should," Manly replied.

Before the heat of summer set in, the family moved to Mount Airy, in the Blue Ridge foothills, to be with Maggie's father, Squire Nutt. Here the children were introduced to another set of grandparents and more aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Papa wrote the Board asking for a hearing in regard to his convictions about missionary procedure, and the date was set for June 7.

Two weeks before the appointment, Manly contracted whooping cough. Every night Papa was up helping him through the paroxysms that shook his small frame and made his eyes enormous in the peaked little face. Then Margaret came down with a high fever.

"What are you doing up?" Papa demanded almost savagely, finding Maggie hovering over the fretful child one night.

"You can't do it all alone, David."

"Do you take me for a weakling? Get yourself to bed where you belong." He put his arm about her and felt the scorch of fever through the thin fabric of her gown, and his heart sank. "You have all you can do to bring that child into the world. I'm going down for some fresh water from the well. If I can sponge Margaret's fever down, she should be all right by morning."

No, he told himself, *it can't be. Not here in the States away from China's noisome pestilences!* But with each slow step down the staircase, lit by a waning moon shining dimly through the round window over the landing, his spirits sank lower. He plummeted a bucket into the well, avoiding the use of the windlass so as not to disturb the household. All around him the night was full of sounds, muted but living sounds of frogs and crickets, the soft thump of the cat's leap from banister to porch. *The doctor is right. This is just one of those things that go along with childbirth. But I wish that baby would come along before I have to go to Richmond.* He poured water over his hands and laved his neck. The day had been unusually warm. *I wish I had water from the well at home,* he thought. *It's twice as cold as this.*

Two days later little David Wells, Junior, was born and things were looking better. Mrs. Nutt and Maggie's sister Agnes took charge, scorning Papa's masculine inefficiency. Even Margaret's fever abated somewhat and she cried for food. Dr. Webb was strict: "No food until we're sure it isn't typhoid."

"According to the Chinese, it's a good sign that she wants food," Papa said. "Another week and Doc thinks she'll be able to take a little more than the rice gruel." He smiled down at Maggie in the huge carved bedstead. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes brighter than usual, but it was probably due to all the excitement. Having children in Shanghai caused less commotion than it did here.

"I don't like to leave you," he said soberly. He sat on the bed and leaned across to look again at his small, red namesake.

"Nonsense, I'll be fine. Mamma is tickled to have me to fuss over and Agnes thinks a new-born baby is made to order." She tugged his hand, and he leaned over to kiss her forehead, smoothing back her hair clumsily. "I'll be praying for you," she whispered, and smiled wanly. "Just remember to hang on to your temper!"

He nodded and stood up. They always communicated so well that on occasions like this there was small need for words.

He swung off the train in Richmond into the bustling traffic of noontime pedestrians. He started to hire a cab but reconsidered in favor of limbering up muscles after the long sooty ride in the day coach. Besides, cab fare would buy the children something. He remembered the boarding house across the street from the First Baptist Church where he and Maggie had stopped overnight just before their send-off to China. If he walked briskly he could get his shoes polished there and double back to Main Street, where the brethren were to meet in the Board's quarters over Ellyson's store. He was glad he'd worn the alpaca coat, which showed wrinkles less than his "good" suit, although Maggie didn't favor it much.

Wagons loaded with country produce lumbered over the cobblestones. Monument Street! So East meets West, sometimes. There was a Monument Street in Tengchow, where the Crawfords lived. But how different the whole picture! Here maids with clean white aprons wheeled baby buggies along tree-bordered sidewalks. Behind the prim iron fences "yahd-men" shuffled about flower beds, closely supervised by their mistresses.

Papa caught a glimpse of headlines as a paper boy wheeled past—something about Gross Inequities in Southern Freight Rates. Whether the conflict was economic or religious—North versus South, or East versus West—the problems would never be resolved apart from a feeling for the land on which people lived. *Neither section has any real basis of comparison,* he thought grimly. *Only in the rural areas can you find a common denominator. If we can get this issue down to the level of the country churches, they will understand what these Shantung missionaries are up against.*

The group of fourteen men was already assembled when Papa was ushered into the heavily wainscoted room in which the Foreign Mission Board held its sessions. Chairman Harris rose to extend his hand and give Papa an introduction to the other dignitaries. Papa fought off a feeling of heavy discouragement. *They were all so old!* He smiled briefly at Brother Ellyson, who'd been a classmate at the seminary eight years before. Ellyson had worn a beard even then.

Brother Hutson was asked to lead in prayer. His words were less a series of petitions and more a statement of opinions than Papa had been accustomed to hearing. *Does he think the Lord's ignorant of the facts we're facing, or is he praying at me?* Papa wondered, his eyes tightly closed.

He listened carefully to the report of the treasurer. The figures were much larger than those he'd handled for the Central China Mission, but the frustrations were the same: total liabilities $22,664.36, as against a balance on hand of $559.93.

Papa recrossed his knees as the chairman of the committee on China Missions stood to give his precisely detailed account. There was a look of smug satisfaction on his face as he itemized his report.

"First, we have been credibly informed by the association supporting Brother Bostick that they won't continue to sustain any work that is not under the direction of the Board."

What does he mean, credibly? Bostick's getting his support from that source, and only from that source. Papa shifted his weight in his chair, his mind racing to catch all the implications. *If this is a proper report of a quorum of the association in question, wouldn't he* *say so?* Papa opened his mouth to protest, but thought better of it. Bostick's resignation was a *fait accompli.* It would be silly to beat drums over a dead issue.

The brother eyed him over half-moon glasses and resumed the reading of his report. "Hence it is presumed that Brother and Mrs. Bostick will return to this country as authorized by the Board on accepting their resignations some months ago."

There was no comment, and after a brief pause the speaker read again from the Spencerian script before him. "Second, we find that Brother League's attitude following our rebuke of his public criticism of the Board is inconsistent with the fraternal relations that should exist between the Board and its missionaries. . . . We feel that our brother, for his own sake and for the sake of the work of the Board, should retire from our service."

There was an unnatural stillness about the group. Dr. Ellyson leaned to the open window beside him and tapped the ashes from his pipe. A pigeon lit on the brick abutment to investigate this human offering more closely. The ordinary sounds from the street below seemed muffled and unreal. Papa shook his head unbelievingly, the lines about his mouth grim. He tried to remember what it was that League had written to the home journals that could have been so offensive. League was one of the newer missionaries assigned to the Shantung area. *Sure, maybe he was a hot-head, but couldn't these fellows make allowances? Didn't they know that words in print were so much—much grimmer, more final, than even the hottest vocal arguments?*

The speaker cleared his throat. "Third, that Brother

Herring be allowed to apologize for coming home despite the refusal of the Board to comply with his request to return at this time." The committee chairman leaned across to lay the report on the table before Dr. Harris. He turned to examine his seat before lowering himself into it, as if fearful that someone might have moved it mischievously or left a tack in it.

Nobody said a word for a full two minutes—or so it seemed to Papa. He wondered if the others could hear the heavy pounding of his heart.

Chairman Harris cleared his throat and rose to his feet. "I might add that, although Brother Herring drew his salary for the month of March, he *did* pay his own expenses to this country. It is—uh—highly unusual for a missionary to expect remuneration from the Board while on furlough."

Papa flushed. He opened his mouth to reply, but Dr. Harris kept the floor. "We have called this special sessions to give you a chance, Brother Herring, to explain your action."

Papa stood. He fought against a tremor in his larynx by swallowing twice. He bowed mockingly. "I appreciate the privilege, Brother Chairman. However, I want it clearly understood that I am *not* here to apologize. I jump at the chance to explain. In fact, I came some 12,000 miles for the purpose. I'd like to explain not only my action but the position of some of my colleagues as well. I plead for a more democratic approach to our problems on that side of the ocean."

Brother Harris cleared his throat. "I think it's proper to assure you that every action we've taken has not only been put to a vote but has been carried unanimously, Brother Herring."

"Yes, but how many of you have seen conditions in China?"

"Would you advocate our taking mission money to cavort around the globe? You heard the treasurer's report."

"Either that, or take our word for the situation," Papa shot back.

The brother from Tennessee uncrossed his legs and leaned forward. "Is your word more to be accepted than that of, say, Mrs. Yates or Brother Tatum?"

Papa flushed again. "These missionaries have scarcely set foot out of the coastal cities. How can they know the conditions in the interior?"

"You may not know it, Brother Herring, but the long journey you made up the Yangsty River has evoked some serious protest from the constituency."

I wish he'd at least learn to pronounce the name right, Papa thought. *He knows that trip was no picnic, nor did it cost the constituency a red cent! "But hang on to your temper, and don't get sidetracked,"* he told himself, remembering Maggie's injunction. Consciously he forced his voice down an octave. "May we discuss the issue of native dress?"

The secretary fumbled through his notes and read from past minutes. "Mrs. Yates, in reply to our communication, says that it's a silly gesture toward conformity."

Papa nodded. "And so it may well be in the cities of Shanghai and Canton, where foreigners abound. But believe me, gentlemen, the conditions aren't the same in the interior. Dr. Crawford—"

Dr. Harris held up his hand. "Your mention of Dr. Crawford's name brings us to the heart of the matter. We can see his influence on you younger missionaries, and frankly, we do not approve of his radical views in the tract he labeled *Churches to the Front*."

"Didn't the Convention of 1869 advocate substantially what he proposes, namely, that the missionaries should be supported by churches directly?"

"That was a long time ago. Other, more practical, methods have been adopted. Progress means sloughing off outdated methods. And, after all, even Baptists need some kind of authority."

Papa leaned forward, his eyes level. "We'll leave the matter of authority for the moment. Progress means sloughing off outdated methods. Good. So long as people aren't sloughed off in the process. Here are six good missionaries disturbed enough to leave our fellowship. Might it not be that a flaw exists on *this* side of the Pacific?"

Mr. Harris coughed, and for a moment no one said anything. "Suppose you outline plainly just what you wish us to consider."

"Fine! First, there is the matter of dress. I have written so much about this in the papers that I'm sure further argument will do little good. I only wish you could see the prejudice here for what it's worth. Nothing, absolutely nothing!" Papa's glance swept the faces before him. "Would you gentlemen like for some group of men in—in Paris, shall we say—to decide summarily what clothes you shall wear in your work? Not just to arbitrate in the matter of fashions, mind you, but decide what is *Christian* dress and what isn't?"

The men laughed. Dr. Tupper flushed. "We've merely expressed ourselves as opposed in principle to deserting our American ways out of fear of offending the heathen. In time, they will see that our methods are superior."

"Are they?" Papa said dryly. "This matter of dress is only illustrative of the larger issue." Here he leaned over, tapping the table with an emphasizing finger. His voice shook in spite of a visible effort at calmness. "We need to make our own decisions. We aren't irresponsible children. We are Baptist *men.* Most of us have had at least two years of Seminary training beyond college, and we should be qualified to make decisions. In fact, it's necessary if we're ever to do any good among those we hope to reach. This, I think, is what Brother League was trying to say—and it's hard enough to *say* it: practically impossible to write it! *We aren't your servants, gentlemen. We are the servants of the Lord.* There is quite a difference!"

There was a moment of stunned silence before Dr. Tupper again took the floor. "I can see why it must look that way from your standpoint, Brother Herring. But, believe me, many of those very decisions that have been made on the field seem utterly childish from our point of view. Couldn't it be that you're too close to things to see the issues accurately?"

"Would you be more explicit? Passing over the matter of my coming home at this time, what other decisions do you find so childish?"

"Well, let's take the matter of the teaching phase of missions. This—this more radical element that the Crawfords seem to represent would spend no money on establishing modern schools. They claim that Chinese schools have been good enough for the Chinese for centuries, so why introduce foreign methods? Can't you see, Brother Herring, how such an attitude seems to us like a betrayal of the primary function of missions? Aren't we told to go into all the world teaching the things of Christ?"

He raised his hand as Papa started to answer. "But perhaps I've been misinformed. Do the native schools teach exclusively by rote and make the children stand with their backs to the teacher, shouting in chorus and making a perfectly horrible din?"

"You have been correctly informed," Papa said. "As to how horrible the din—that would depend on whether you were pleased or displeased with the results. Actually these schoolboys show an amazing fund of knowledge at a very early age. But the reason behind that decision of the Crawfords is one I can fully understand. There's so little money, at best, for missions: let's spend it on the primary business of telling the Gospel story—evangelism. After all, the Lord told us to go into all the world and *preach* the gospel, then teach. All in good time, Christian schools will follow. To push the matter of education before establishing churches would just further the cause of heathenism really, or actually promote agnosticism. You can't teach a boy to be a Christian. He must be born into the kingdom and then you can teach him."

Dr. Harris fingered the papers on the table before him. "I suppose it's inevitable that men should differ in these areas. Perhaps our denomination hasn't articulated clearly enough our philosophy of mission procedure. As you know, we veer away from creeds. Certainly, of late there has been little enough to buttress our position. The Landmarkists are making things very difficult for us. Why have an elected Board at all, if we're to have no authority in the situation? As I said before, even Baptists need authority of some kind."

Dr. Tupper smiled. "You missionaries have to answer to *some* group. Would you prefer answering to a million and a half individuals instead of to us?"

"I would prefer answering to the church that supports me. In that close fellowship and *only* in that close fellowship would there be the proper climate for the sort of discipline that we may need. Don't forget that, whether Bostick or League or the Crawfords receive their support from the Board or not, they are still Southern Baptists and you can't deny them fellowship in their home churches. You can't even deny Bostick the privilege of being a foreign missionary. He has no notion of returning to the States, as you presume. His support is still coming in from the association, despite the report your committee heard." Papa's eyes flashed. "I just don't believe Baptists should stoop to excommunication."

Dr. Tupper flushed. "I resent that charge."

Papa raised his eyebrows, but his lips kept their thin straight line under the sober moustache.

Mr. Hutson shook his head and leaned over to whisper to Mr. Ellyson, beside him. "Let me ask you something, Brother Herring," he said placatingly. "Suppose we do make room for the direct support that you seem to want, what guarantee can we have that the constituency won't tire of the method? Do you believe that the adoption of these—uh—so-called democratic procedures would result in an influx of missionaries and the money to support them?"

"Of course I do. I have the greatest faith in what the country churches will do, once their eyes have been lifted to the harvests overseas. Hundreds of these churches give only pittances because they have no real link with the missionaries. The strong central organization appeals to those in the city churches, perhaps, because people in the cities are used to a strong central organization such as this Board. But our denomination should, as you say, 'make room' for those in the rural areas. After all, they make up the bulk of our membership."

"Your faith in your fellows is commendable, Brother Herring, but not every missionary will be able to count on the loyalty of family and friends that you have had." Brother Hutson crossed his knees and leaned back in his chair. "You still haven't answered my question. What if the money doesn't come in?"

"If the missionary starves, let him starve! It's a risk we must take. *Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.*"

Mr. Harris raised his eyebrows. Several shook their heads in stiff silence.

Brother Whitfield rose ponderously to his feet. He swayed against hands that pushed on the smooth surface of the table. Papa had the feeling that the slender table legs were being driven down, down, almost to China.

But the words were unctuous. "Our estimable brother must surely see that such action would negate the function of the Board completely. Rather than to press for these uncooperative attitudes, wouldn't it be better to emulate the example of our esteemed Sister Yates? As you know, she is inactive because of ill-health, but self-supporting by reason of her husband's investments in Shanghai. Not wanting to appear insubordinate, she requests and awaits permission to return to the States, even though she is furnishing her own transportation." He swept the room with a glance of benign approval.

Papa leaned back in his chair. He'd done all he could. But it wasn't enough. A Chinese would have read the meaning of his frigid politeness. His hand shook as he parted his moustache carefully.

But the gentlemen were too engrossed in their own responses. "So you see, you are asking what's impossible for us to grant—"

"Yes." Chairman Harris took the floor again. "We stand ready to accept your—"

Papa scraped his chair noisily, as he jerked to his feet. "Gentlemen, you have made yourselves very clear. Six months ago I was pleading with Bostick to reconsider his resignation. I believed so firmly in the democratic methods of Baptists that I wagered my whole future on it." He groped for his hat and held it over his heart. The gesture wasn't meant to be dramatic. No one could see the turbulence behind his shabby black felt. He cleared his throat. "I still believe in them. I believe in them so thoroughly that I'm forced to resign from the Board in order to practice them. Good day, gentlemen."

Mr. Harris was on his feet. He held up a hand against the silence that washed like a fog through the room. "Wait a minute, Brother Herring. You are entitled to know the reaction of this body. What is your pleasure, gentlemen?"

There was the briefest of pauses.

"I move his resignation be accepted and the treasurer be instructed to refund our brother's travel allowance to the States."

"Second the motion."

Without pause the motion was carried and Papa closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER 6

Whom The Lord Loveth

Squire Nutt lived some three miles from the train station, but Papa welcomed the walk, even with the rumblings of thunder clouds on the horizon. He turned down the offer of a ride with old Rufus Wiggins, who drove the Rural Free Delivery wagon. His thoughts were still in a whirl, and he needed to borrow tranquillity from the elements. His fingers groped for the trinkets in his pocket. He hadn't forgotten the children. There was a tiny china doll for Margaret and tops for the boys. What he had for Maggie—news of his resignation—was something less than he would have chosen. But she would understand.

Again there was the grumble of thunder in the south. She would understand, but she would suffer, and he wished he could spare her that. What was it the Romans said about thunder on the left? Maggie would know. He'd have to ask her. Big drops were beginning to fall just as he reached the porch. Manly and George raced to welcome him.

"How's your mother?" he asked them, but his glance questioned Mrs. Nutt, who stood in the doorway behind them.

"The doctor says she's not to try sittin' up yet," she said. "Seems like she's slow to get her strength back. Margaret's no better either."

Papa hung his hat on the deer antlers in the hall and bounded up the steps. Outside, the rain pelted on the window panes and the afternoon merged suddenly into twilight.

With one glance at his face Maggie sensed what had happened. She held out an arm, the ruffles on her sleeve slipping to the slender elbow. "They couldn't see it?"

"Not the dimmest outlines of what we are driving at. They felt they were being *magnanimous* in offering me a chance to apologize for leaving China without their permission. Can you beat that? Do they take us for children, or something?" His eyes smoldered like blue flames.

"Don't take it so hard, David." But she knew as she spoke them that the words were futile. "What did you do, then?"

"Do? What *could* I do but resign?" He was striding up and down the room. He hurled himself into a chair beside her and pulled up the sleeves of his shirt through the restraining arm bands, leaning forward intently. "Tell me, could I have done anything else?"

"No. I don't see how you could. Do they know how you have tried to keep the Shantung missionaries from precipitate action?"

"I don't know what they know." There was bitterness in his voice as he jerked up again and stood at the window, watching the rain sluice down the glass. "They don't think I should have drawn our March salary, but they will reimburse me for my passage money home." He whirled about. "And that after we've been living voluntarily on two-thirds of what some missionaries got!"

"What will we *do?*"

He knew from the tremor in her voice that tears were in her eyes, and he was glad for the darkness. "Do? We'll go back, of course. Join the Gospel Mission as they wanted me to months ago. We haven't resigned from the Lord, you know. Or from Wells's Chapel, where our membership is." He came over to sit beside her again. "You aren't afraid, are you? I can get that money, you know, just as soon as the brethren get wind of their highhandedness."

"Yes, but I hate for us to be the ones to tell it!"

"So do I, but what choice do we have?"

Margaret whimpered in her bed. Papa went to the cot and bent over the child, but she wasn't awake. "The doctor know what it is, yet?"

"He says, if it's malaria, she ought to be getting over it by the last of the week. But I can't see any difference from one day to the next."

Between vigils by the sick, Papa read and wrote letters to the *Biblical Recorder.* Every Sunday he was gone, preaching at churches scattered throughout the Piedmont section of the state. He missed Maggie's help in writing the letters, but she was able to share his reactions as he read to her the articles that appeared, pro and con, each week. Whatever else his resignation had done, it had furnished a tidy, red-hot issue for the denominational press.

One brother waxed virtuously indignant at the proposed departure from what he called "Christian dress." Just how peg-leg trousers and leg-o'-mutton sleeves were more Christian than the flowing garments then current in China, he neglected to explain. He wrote:

> To conform to heathen custom in order to avoid the taunts and reproaches of the Chinese is doing the same thing that the Christians of the first century did, to their sorrow: trifling with their consciences to make Christianity more acceptable to the heathen. Such concessions inevitably lead to more and more compromises and less and less positive witness. Soon these missionaries will have no positive message to share with the benighted heathen.

Maggie's bed shook in weak laughter. "Pray what kind of positive message has *he?*"

They labored together over Papa's letter of explanation, following the stark announcement of his resignation.

> I should like to say that my resignation does not mean at all that I don't intend to go back to China. . . . It was not occasioned by any personal difference with the Board. I fear that their failure to understand the situation on the mission field will necessitate other resignations, but even so, this should do no violence to the foreign mission work, for we will be enlisting direct support from those churches that are not now enlisted. It is our belief that one department of our work under the Board should accommodate itself to the simplicity and economy of the country churches so that they may feel a real part in the enterprise.
>
> I hope my action will not prove the occasion for controversy. I am in this country in behalf of the unreached millions of China and am ready to present this cause in person wherever I'm asked. We hope to see many who will feel called to say to the churches to which they belong, *Here am I, send me.*

One day, after mail time, Papa took the steps two at a time and hurled himself into the chair by Maggie. "Will you listen to this p-h-u-l-e? Of all the dad-gummed, blasted nonsense! What in tarnation does he—?"

Maggie patted his knee. "Simmer down, David. What does the brother say?"

Papa shot an indignant glance toward Maggie. It was plain to see he wasn't so sure of the fraternal relationship. His voice shook with suppressed rage, but he managed to read the article.

> Suppose a captain abandoning without leave his command at some distant post had appeared before General Grant, full of the conceit that he knew more about the business than anyone else, and had set about disaffecting the companies, persuading them to break themselves up into guerrilla bands to fight according to his private notion—what would have been the result? He would have been shot in less than twenty-four hours. Shot for desertion and disloyalty.

Maggie shook her head in disbelief. The babe was at her breast, and she was trying to wake him to the business at hand. She gave it up as a bad job and signaled Papa to put him in the cradle. By the time he'd seated himself beside her, she had her voice under control. "I guess that's what I've been afraid of," she said. "It's—it's pretty raw, isn't it?"

"Raw? Why, it's savage."

"You know what? He made a tactical error that just might boomerang," Maggie said, a bit timorously. "Nobody is going to get excited over what happened in Grant's army. Now if he'd mentioned Lee!"

Papa grinned. "I believe you're right!" He slapped his knee. The baby opened his eyes, clutched convulsively, and subsided into sleep again. Papa lowered his voice. "This one doesn't even merit an answer, does it?"

Maggie smiled. "It'll be answered, but not by us. You just wait and see."

It was. Chief among the letters was one written by Papa's classmate and friend, Dr. E. M. Poteat, then of Boston.

> Dr. Mabie, who has made an extensive tour of the East, told me recently that D. W. Herring impressed him as an ideal missionary, in many respects the finest he had met in the Orient. When such a man comes home consumed with a zeal for the millions who have never heard the Gospel, his head teeming with facts gathered on the field, and his heart burning to tell his story to the churches and so stir their laggard missionary spirit, is it fair to such a man that his suggestion of a more aggressive evangelism should bring upon him the suspicions of his brethren?
>
> For my part, I uncover my head in the presence of men who, under what they believe to be the call of the Holy Spirit, propose to meet the needs of the heathen. God speed these men and save their brethren at home from the sin of embarrassing their work.

"See?" Maggie said when Papa read the article aloud to her, not without a glow of satisfaction. "I said you'd be vindicated. But there's one thing you'll have to watch. You're in a vulnerable position and you have to guard against vindictiveness in yourself, even in a good cause. That's what ruined Luther—so Dr. Hobgood used to say. And Luther's cause was greater than ours."

Papa knew her fondness for Dr. Hobgood, president of the Oxford Female Seminary, where Maggie had graduated two years before they'd gone to China. She reached her hand across to lay it on his arm. "That—that bit of sarcasm you wrote in the *Recorder* last week—about the 'erudite Dr. Harris'—well, it wasn't worthy of you, David. Really it wasn't like you at all—the *you* I know, that is."

Papa flushed. "Why didn't you tell me so then?"

"Maybe it needed to be said. How was I to know? But people reading it would get a false impression about you, and *that* I resent."

Papa noted the fragile look of her hands, the veins standing blue against the pale skin, and something turned over within him. He blinked rapidly and traced gently with his thumb over the V of her forefinger muscles. "I don't deserve such faith in me," he said softly.

"Fiddlesticks! Faith is no gift. You've earned it. Faith is like these muscles, see? Because I've used my fingers, there's strength in the muscles, and if I hadn't used them there would be no strength there. It's as simple as that." She laughed weakly and brushed away tears that welled in her eyes. "Only, if I don't soon get out of this bed, I won't have much strength, even in my fingers. Faith needs something to strive against, something to lift, burdens to bear. This conflict will make even more of a man of you than you are now, you see if it doesn't. Anything more than that is not our responsibility, is it?"

Papa's faith was in for stiffer trials than he'd known before. In mid-July the doctor pronounced Margaret's illness and Maggie's typhoid. Though Margaret's fever dropped suddenly in the third week, its ravages on the childish features wrung Papa's heart. He canceled his speaking engagements indefinitely. Maggie seemed likely at times to bleed to death, and no one knew anything about blood transfusions. The doctor drove out every day, refusing any kind of payment for his service. "Just pray for us," he'd say.

Prayers, however, didn't seem to be accomplishing much. Papa stayed in the darkened room day and night, emerging only for fresh water and more sick-room supplies. No one knew how the disease was transmitted. They tried to keep a sort of quarantine.

Through the open door one day, Manly peered in toward his sister and waved his hand. She smiled feebly and tried to wave in return. Two days later, on Sunday, she died. Maggie hovered so close to the borderline of unconsciousness that she probably didn't know of her loss. The following Sunday she died, and her grave made the second in the stark new cemetery on the hill on the other side of the little city.

That evening, following the funeral, Papa sat between his small sons on the front porch steps and stared out into the gathering dusk. The dark swishing skirts of the neighbor ladies had rustled across the yard to the waiting buggies where their menfolk spat tobacco juice into the embarrassing void of conversation. He was glad there was no further need of mustering fitting replies to their condolences. From the open window above came the thin wail of little David's protests, as if he were aware of the small chance a motherless baby had to survive.

Squire Nutt crossed the porch and held out his hand to George. "Want to he'p Grampa feed the stock?" He stopped in front of Papa and gestured toward the window above. "Agnes is not givin' up without a fight," he said. "She'll pull that baby through if anyone can."

Papa nodded numbly. He was glad someone else could take over. There was very little fight left in him at the moment. His head ached mercilessly. Manly looked up at him, and his brown eyes brimmed with unspoken questions.

"Want to go with George and Grandpa?"

"No."

Papa staggered to his feet. "Let's walk," he said.

That was Papa's way when he didn't know what else to do: just to put one foot before the other, time after time after time. And since he didn't really falter himself, the child that trudged beside him caught no sense of aimlessness in the paternal pattern. Like Isaac, he might not know where they were headed, but he knew well whom he was with, and that was all that really mattered.

Two days later Papa took the two little boys and made the dreary train trip to the farm in Pender County. Perhaps here, he would not miss her so keenly. Every morning he helped with the farm chores and toward noon plodded down the long lane to the mail box, the boys chattering beside him. The trip to the mail box was the only break in the lonely days. Food for the mind meant more than the meals of summer vegetables and hot biscuits that Grandma set before him wistfully. He read and reread the letters from friends. One week there were letters from China—from the Bosticks, the Bryans, and Mrs. Yates. They had not yet heard of his resignation, much less of his bereavement.

And it was the bereavement that had desolated Papa.

Losing his winsome little daughter had been bitter, but losing Maggie had rocked his universe. She was his confidante—the one-closer-than-a-brother—his other, better self. Only she could know the full reasons behind the resignation. Only she could make the gentle suggestions that tended to keep him on an even keel.

He slumped into the rocker on the porch. The wind rustled the pages of the *Recorder*. There, between ads for sewing machines and patent medicines guaranteed to cure everything from consumption to bloating gas pains, was a tiny notice. "Mrs. David Herring, née Maggie Nutt of Mount Airy, died. . . ." A handful of words to mark the close of a life that had meant so much! Somehow it just didn't seem right. His fingers moved in slow bewilderment across his forehead. She was his wife! Cheerful and uncomplaining, she'd undergirded *all* his missionary endeavor. The meagre words mocked his sorrow. How little the world could understand, much less dissipate, the black void that engulfed him!

He thought of Browning's words about Saul, the imperfect, groping in a similar darkness and "caught in his pangs." The poem had been Maggie's favorite. She'd always insisted that the part about loving and being Beloved—personified—was really about her David, as well as that other one. One line echoed within him as he'd never known mere words to do before:

'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! My flesh,
that I seek . . . .

Late in August he again caught the train, this time for Wilmington. He would accept the urgent invitation of a former college mate to recuperate there, near the sea, for a few weeks. No need to worry Ma about it, but he knew in his bones that he, too, was in for a bout with typhoid and he'd better hole up somewhere near a doctor. Never in his life had he felt so alone. The fever was as nothing compared with the acute and devastating sense of isolation within him.

No one wrote it in the papers he searched so eagerly, but by its very absence, the searing implication was there. *Herring was being taken to the divine woodshed, and about the kindest thing anyone could think to do was to look the other way.*

CHAPTER 7

Odds On a Chinaman's Chance

One day early in September, Grandma found Manly behind the barn sobbing brokenly. "Mamma's gone, and Margaret, and now Papa's going to die and who'll go back to China with me?"

Her eyes reddened as she looked down at the little fellow, and she took his hand silently. They pushed their way through crowding chickens to the front porch, and Grandma pulled him to her lap and rocked wordlessly.

Manly was glad there was no one around to see or to tease. He watched the twig of black gum that moved from one side of her mouth to the other. Usually she didn't let anyone see her dipping snuff, perhaps for the same reason he was wary about being babied publicly. People he knew in China didn't dip, but Papa had said that sort of thing didn't matter. Papa smoked, but of course he was a man. Manly decided it must be all right for ladies to dip snuff when they were *old*. He sighed shudderingly. There was so much that was hard to understand in this country.

"Your pa's gonna get well," she said, firmly.

"He is?" His face brightened. "Are you sure?"

Grandma nodded. "Those letters that came yesterday —I wasn't sure till then. Mrs. Yates was tellin' about the Chinese stayin' at the church till midnight, prayin' for your pa. Don't that beat all?"

Manly slid from her lap, his face transformed. "Goody," he said. "Wouldn't it be nice if we had Chinese to pray for us every time?"

By October, Papa was out of the valley of the shadow again, and chafing against his doctor's orders to rest.

"You should at least wait until you get some hair on that scalp of yours," Dr. Alderman said, grinning. "If you aren't a sight! I'd never claim kinship with you if I didn't know it was the fever that did it."

Papa grimaced and his face sobered. "It's as if I had another fever inside. Paul said it well: 'Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel.' And the time is growing short."

The doctor knocked his pipe on the banister. "Two more weeks," he decreed. "But you can begin readin' the magazines again, if you won't get so all-fired excited over what those fools are sayin'."

What people were saying now was entirely in Papa's favor, however. Nobody was inclined to kick the underdog, especially when he was putting up the scrap that Papa seemed to be against the odds opposing him. A lesser man would have given up and allowed the Chinese to fend for themselves. Not Papa. He girded himself for the conflict ahead.

Papa had no desire to capitalize on his late bereavement, but public opinion being what it was, he had to face a wave of sympathy engendered by Dr. Hobgood's rather wordy memoir about Maggie:

> She walked in the path of duty, and a sweet restfulness possessed her. The ease with which she acquired the language, her helpfulness to her husband, her sympathy with him in his work, and her sound practical sense were all remarked on by her colleagues abroad. I doubt not that, had she lived, she would have equaled Mrs. Ann Hasletine Judson in the heroic qualities that characterized this noble woman. We shall not look upon her like again, beautiful in person, beautiful in mind, beautiful in heart.

Papa couldn't help being moved by the response to Maggie's piety. Across the state the same idea prompted the gathering of small offerings to purchase a stone for her grave in Mt. Airy.

The little ceremony when the tall granite marker was placed in the cemetery was Papa's first public appearance after his illness. He wished he'd brought the boys, but Manly was in school and it wouldn't have been fair to bring George alone. Back at the Nutt homestead he looked down at little David, who lay too quietly in his crib. He should have been sitting up, but he couldn't. Agnes hovered over him protectively. "You won't try to take him East, will you?"

Papa shook his head. "He's much better off here, and I'm grateful for your care of him."

In November, the election of a Democrat, Grover Cleveland, to the Presidency was giving the South a general feeling of euphoria unknown since the rigors of the War Between the States. The political campaign had a natural counterpart in Baptist circles. Papa found himself in demand again in the old familiar haunts. Something of the excitement that flowed among the brethren was evident in the way the farmers quickened their harvesting in order to spend two or three days at the annual " 'sociation meetin's" of their fellow Baptists. With a nice warm issue at stake, no one wanted to miss the fireworks.

But sometimes Papa felt a vague discomfort. "Why do things always have to be so black and white?" he complained to his sister Mollie once. "During the war, thanks to a Yankee press, it was the pious Yanks against the rascally Rebs! Can't folks see that there's right on both sides of an issue?"

Aunt Mollie laughed. "For all our boasting about democratic procedures, we Baptists would much rather play follow the leader. It's so much more comfortable to let someone else do the thinking." She reached up to straighten his collar. "Whether you like it or not, Dave Wells, you've been elected leader of a militant minority."

Occasional reactions to his talks were reported in the *Biblical Recorder:*

> On December 18th, Reverend David Wells Herring spoke at the Bear Creek Church to the Missionary Baptist Association convening there. [Being "missionary" meant they were opposed to the "hard-shells," who frowned on disturbing the consciences of the heathen at all.] He described the condition of the Chinese as he had observed them, morally, intellectually and religiously. He closed with an earnest appeal for this benighted land. The address was full of vivid description, of enthusiasm and of love for China.
>
> Probably the best passage in his address was the ridicule bestowed on the politicians who would pass a bill to prevent Chinese immigration to the United States. Missionary Her-

ring believes that a free interchange of commerce and ideas would be beneficial to both nations.

Replying to charges that he was putting a premium on ignorance by opposing the efforts to Americanize the Chinese, Papa wrote the *Recorder:*

> No, we are not opposed to schools. We recognize what schools have done for our denomination in America and look for them to do the same in China. But we propose to let the schools have their place and come in the wake of Christianity. They will be the natural outgrowth of indigenous churches. We shall encourage the Chinese Christians to educate their children. As heathen they have educated their children; will they not do so even more as Christians? The Gospel is such that all people may receive it as it is. Fortunately no one needs to be educated *before* he can receive it. Our first task is to get the "good news" to as many as we can.
>
> It seems foolish to me to hear preachers pleading for our type of schools on the ground that the Chinese language had thus to be made capable of conveying Christian thought. In the name of the language of Confucius, I protest!
>
> Further, we are not opposed to a native ministry, but we do object to paying them with foreign money. When the natives learn that their associate is being paid by the foreigner, they suspect him at once as having sold out to an alien and lose respect for him. He would better support himself and preach only once a week, as Paul probably did, than let this suspicion rest upon him. Alas, they have grounds for their suspicions! Men have been employed as preachers until for some cause their pay was stopped. Whereupon they quit preaching and went back into heathenism, showing that they were never really converted at all.
>
> Some argue against a small salary by saying a man must have money to become an example of liberality to the converts. I answer: the best example of liberality ever given was that of a widow who possessed only two mites.

"But," say others, "there are so many poor and needy ones! How can we fail to minister funds to them?"

Indeed there are. Far more pitiable cases than people in this country can ever imagine! But if we undertake to relieve all the beggars of China we shall not only exhaust our missionary treasury but that of the whole United States as well!

In December, on one of his frequent visits to Mount Airy, Papa saw that little David was growing steadily weaker. He followed the doctor to the buggy, where a raw blast of wind from the Blue Ridge drove the fallen leaves against their legs and tore at their upturned collars.

Doc tamped tobacco into his pipe, unwilling, apparently, to face the stricken look in Papa's eyes. "Enteritis," he said gruffly. "The wonder is he's lived this long!"

"He's his mother's last gift to me," Papa said brokenly. "She insisted on his being named for me." He blew his nose vigorously. "This time, you must let me pay you, Doctor. You've made it out here so often!"

Dr. Webb climbed into the buggy and slapped the reins. "The day I have to charge foreign missionaries—" he muttered. Then, as the mare wheeled slowly out of the yard, he called over his shoulder. "See you tomorrow."

But that night the baby died in Papa's arms.

Aunt Mollie brought the little boys up from Pender County, and again there was the solemn trip to the cemetery. The mound of earth lay almost against the new granite shaft that pointed skyward in stark simplicity.

"Couldn't you have spared your children this—these details?" someone asked with more candor than tact.

George had fallen asleep on Papa's shoulder and Manly trudged wide-eyed beside him as they gathered on the unturfed hillside and waited to lay galax leaves on the small new mound.

"How are we to keep a family entity, otherwise?" Papa countered, and shook his head. "No. We're in this together. There'll be miles and miles between us, perhaps, but no vacuums emotionally, if I can help it."

And with the coming of the new year, even this experience he was sublimating into the passion of his life. To Aunt Mollie he wrote:

> The six months of his short little life were a tremendous struggle for Grandma Nutt and Sister Agnes, and for that reason they mourn him even more than I. You care most about those for whom you have done the most. It is this simple fact that I long to see put into action in regard to church support for the foreign missionary. . . .

Manly was excited to be going to school in the same little log house that Papa had attended, first as pupil and then as teacher. He was eager to hear tales of Papa's boyhood, as if to nourish his own roots.

"Did Papa really hitch a horse to your rocking chair and ride it like a sleigh through the snow?" Manly asked his grandma. He sailed his cap toward the ceiling and was pleased that it managed to snag a deer antler.

Grandma's eyes twinkled, but her voice was stern. "Don't you go gettin' any of your pa's wild notions. That boy'd try anything once! Better make him tell you 'bout it—and 'bout takin' the wagon into Burgaw later to pick up the chair when the snow melted 'fore noon. That part wa'nt half so funny!"

With the coming of summer, Papa's efforts took on new animation. Five young men had indicated a willingness to cast their lot in the burgeoning venture known as the Gospel Mission. From Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee the calls came, asking Papa to speak in the churches. Dr. Tupper, the Board's secretary, had resigned; whether because of popular criticism, it is hard to say. Officially there was a dignified effort to suppress discussion of the Gospel Mission issue in favor of a drive for organizational loyalty and religious decorum. This meant that sometimes, even in his own neighborhood associations, Papa's name was purposely excluded from the program, though there was never a question of his being "a member in good standing," as the term was used within the framework of the individual church.

On one such occasion, his friends, piqued at the omission, prodded him to claim a hearing. It was one of those early September days when the earth seemed to stand still, congratulating itself on a summer's job well done. The smell of scuppernongs and dry fodder hung over the neighboring fields, while the horses switched their tails lazily under the trees in the churchyard. The women had given a last hurried peek at the bulging lunch baskets in the buggies and bundled their babies, both "knee" and "arm," into the weathered frame building. Papa moved among the old-timers, shaking hand after calloused hand. This was the priceless moment of indulgence in the final "chaw of tobaccy," the parting gibe and chuckle before taking seats in stolid silence on the hard wooden benches within. *It's almost as if they put on their Sunday aspects along with their stiff collars and are equally uncomfortable in either*, Papa thought.

"Talk to us in the grove durin' dinner," Cousin Tobias

Newton drawled. Anywhere in southeastern North Carolina Papa was sure to have a generous sprinkling of cousins in the congregation. Sometimes he had to grope his way through a maze of relationships, but he always came out triumphantly with a bona fide kinship by either marriage or birth some generations back.

"Let's see now, your grandpa was *my* grandma's second cousin once removed, I believe," Papa said in all seriousness. "But we're even closer kin on your mother's side, aren't we?"

Cousin Toby grunted. "Somethin' like that. You gonna let them city slickers ease you right outta yore own huntin' ground, Dave Wells?"

Papa laughed. "You think I'd rather talk than eat?"

"We'll see you're fed," Uncle Alfred said, aiming a sluice of tobacco juice at a stalk of goldenrod. " 'Sides, Miss Willie done brought two cakes, special fer you. That gal's sure settin' her cap fer you, Dave Wells."

Papa's laugh was a bit forced. *Did they know she'd even offered to go back to China with him to take care of him and his motherless children? They didn't miss much, these slow-spoken farmers in the so-called backwoods.*

"If they're so set on suppressin' free discussion, let 'em take over the graveyard," another observed grimly. "It should be quiet enough there!"

Papa grinned. Never let it be said that he'd lose a golden opportunity like this. He was their missionary and he didn't intend to let them down, however his action might be interpreted at headquarters. "Your preacher wants to keep in the good graces of the brethren in Raleigh. How're you going to manage that?"

Cousin Toby guffawed. "There's ways," he said pointedly. "Just you git yourse'f ready to spout. We'll be a-listenin'."

So Papa spouted and they listened, moving quietly among the laden tables and chewing pensively.

"Ain't this the way it wuz when the Lord preached?" one farmer muttered to another. "I ain't so sure I take to that canned religion, nohow. It's got so people pay more 'tention to the trappin's than to the meat of the Word."

"This is the way I talk to the Chinese," Papa told them, with a touch of flamboyance. "Here, under the arching branches of live oak and sycamore, common people can share an affinity with the Eternal, untrammeled by the ceilings of human artifice.

For the love of God is broader
   Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
   Is most wonderfully kind.

If our love were but more simple,
   We should take Him at His word;
And our lives would be all sunshine
   In the sweetness of our Lord

But of course not even these hardy pioneers could live forever under skies that on occasion drenched the just and unjust with equal unconcern: a fact Papa was too practical to ignore. How to fit the "free spirit" of his religious heritage into the framework of modern convention was a problem that had baffled older and wiser men than he. All he knew for certain was that, irrevocably, he'd cast his lot with an underprivileged people. What if he had but "a Chinaman's chance"? Who was he to ask for more?

With plans maturing for his return to China in October, Papa welcomed every opportunity to speak, often at widely separated points. He wanted to be with his small sons as much as possible, but he sometimes found himself in financial straits when he took them along. He'd made it a point never to permit a collection for his cause, lest he seem to be working in competition with the Board, which he held in esteem, regardless of their differences. Unsolicited gifts from individuals were quite a different matter.

One day, as Papa kept an upstate appointment in a community unusually poor, even by current rural standards, only a few coins jingled in his pocket, but the boys were unaware of his predicament. Three one-dollar bills were all he received, and they came from a man who had walked twenty miles to the service. The fare home was $3.67. Balance in the treasury as they boarded the train amounted to the grand total of thirteen cents. Papa had known the discipline of an empty stomach in the lean years at Wake Forest, where he'd split kindling and chopped wood to acquire an education, but it was a different matter to see his children suffer on the seven-hour trip that faced them. The Herring exchequer was slim, but hungry boys just had to be fed.

When the train crawled to a noisy stop in Goldsboro and the passengers rushed to the surrounding restaurants, Papa led the boys into a nearby shack in which a Negro woman was ironing. A wood range sputtered in the dark interior. The air was heavy with the odor of collard greens and chitterlings.

"Would that pay for some food for the children?" Papa asked, proffering his meagre hoard.

"He'p yo'self," she invited them affably, setting plates and food on the clean oilcloth-covered table.

"Is there any fellowship quite like that of the very poor?" Papa asked Grandma that night.

In June, he took Manly with him to Asheville, where he'd been asked to preach for a week. One night he preached from the text, "And the Lord called unto Adam, Where art thou?" Manly sat on the hard front bench and listened intently. What he heard was simple uncomplicated truths most easily acceptable to a child or to the childlike. Papa never believed that profundity was synonymous with obfuscation, or that deep truths had to be couched in pedantic religious terminology. As he told it, Adam's lost innocence was completely understandable to anyone—even a child. Who in all the world could bear comparison with the perfection that Jesus represented? No one who was honest. And it was hard not to be honest around Papa.

After the service, the crowd moved out into the surrounding darkness illuminated by shafts of lamplight that flowed from the open windows and doors.

"I'm sorry I came tonight," said a lady fidgeting nervously with the watch chain on her bosom. "You made me feel *most* uncomfortable."

"I hope I made it clear that you don't need to *stay* uncomfortable," Papa replied. "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus*, you know."

"Like if someone took a whipping I was supposed to get?" Manly asked, his hand in Papa's.

"Exactly," Papa answered him gently.

Alone in their bedroom later, Manly knelt longer than usual at his prayers. Bouncing from his knees, he chirruped, "Papa, I used not to feel anything when I prayed, but tonight I felt it."

Papa blew out the light and they lay in the friendly darkness. "Even if you'd met only the President of the United States, you'd be excited, wouldn't you? Tonight you've met a Greater than he. But turn over and go to sleep."

Manly was quiet a moment. "Papa, you used to tell me I had to love God better than you, but I couldn't. But I do, now. Now I know that Mamma and Margaret are all right."

The next morning, wanting to know if Manly had settled down to normal emotional patterns, Papa excused himself to his host and wandered out to where the child was absorbed in examining the buggy that stood in the carriage shed behind the sprawling house. He was down on his knees investigating the brake mechanism. No such contrivance had been needed on the flat terrain of Pender County. Behind them, the morning mists enveloped the mountains and softened the leisurely klop-klop of horse-drawn traffic on the cobblestoned street.

"Well, how do things look to you today?" he asked the little boy.

Manly didn't lift his head. "Look, Papa. Isn't it funny how this block slides here?" He stood up. "Oh," he said then, and his eyes met Papa's gravely. "I don't feel like I did last night, but I love God just the same!"

Late in October came the day when Papa had to leave for China again. Long before dawn, he was moving around in the little front room of the house. Manly knelt with him beside the bed where George slept and heard his father's prayer of committal. Together they made their way from their room through the parlor and back to the kitchen with its odors of strong soap, clabbering milk, and the familiar pungency of pork in all its many forms. Papa set Manly to grinding coffee while he laid in the stove the fat "light'ood" kindling, which a match ignited merrily.

Ma appeared in the door and managed a brief smile. No one was trying to hide the pain of separation, but each in his own way had hit upon the secret of busying himself with the trivial in order to endure the profound. Soon Ma was pinching off the soft balls of dough for biscuits, lining them up in a dark pan which had weathered many a previous session in the oven. Ham, grits, and eggs followed in natural sequence.

"I'll see how Pa's gettin' along with hitching up Maud," Papa said. Then, as if in afterthought, "It's a good home for the boys, Ma. With roots like you've given me—" he coughed self-consciously, but his eyes glowed with appreciation. "Well, don't spoil them, that's all." And he closed the door behind him.

Her back to Manly, Ma wiped her eyes furtively with her long apron. But Manly had seen her.

"I'm going to quit crying now," he said sturdily. "It's easier to think about seeing him again."

CHAPTER 8

Frontier Faith

*I*t was Christmas Eve. Papa and three new missionaries were nearing Pingtu, in Shantung Province, where Dr. and Mrs. Crawford eagerly awaited the Gospel Mission recruits. A cold dry wind had battered the wayfarers daily since they'd left the snug houseboat at Tengchow to begin the overland trek. The fine loess sand stung their faces and increased the dreariness of the landscape. They took turns stretching out under the matting canopy of the cart which carried their luggage; but even rolled up in rugs, they felt bruised to the bones in the springless contraption that rumbled clumsily over the frozen ruts.

Their two weeks of travel on the canal had somewhat inured the novices to China's hardships, but Mr. Blalock was sick with dysentery, and he recoiled at the lack of sanitation everywhere.

"Even the donkeys seem better trained," he grumbled.

Papa laughed. "Those layers of humus in the road are there to encourage the animals to—provide fertilizer. All year long the farmer exacts a sort of toll for the use of the road by his field. You see, you learn to hoard everything here."

"Even germs!" Mr. Crocker remarked dryly.

They were still self-conscious in their new padded garments. Papa had insisted they each get fur-lined headgear with flaps over the ears. From these their new artificial queues dangled grotesquely. Now, in the frigid blasts from the Gobi Desert, they were glad of the protection for their shaven foreheads. They watched Papa's responses closely whenever he acted as interpreter. His Shanghai dialect was not too readily understood, but he was accepted as a native and not as a barbarian, apparently.

"They think us either stupid or deaf," Papa explained. "When we stop at the food shops let's try not to talk anything but Chinese. That way, you'll learn faster."

Mr. Royall shouted in laughter, and the muleteer turned to look curiously at the men slogging along determinedly. "My entire repertoire consists of the polite query, 'Have you eaten your rice?' *Ne ch'h ba fan?* I can think of more stimulating conversation."

"The trick is to let them teach you," Papa said. "If you want someone to like you, give him a chance to do you a favor."

Before dusk of the third day they passed through the east gate of the city of Pingtu. Here the Crawfords and the Bostick family had found a temporary home following their break with the Board. They had written Papa to join them in order to decide on a new field of labor. The small procession drew curious glances from the natives, but Papa was encouraged to note that the mothers did not shield their children in fear, as had often been the case in some of the villages they'd passed through. How much of the prejudice had been overcome by the thirty years of patient living in these stark surroundings on the part of the venerable Crawfords no one would ever really know.

Shopkeepers were boarding up their stalls against the darkness. Their name-banners, whipped by the wind, brushed the caps of the tall strangers. Bronzed chickens hung against the far walls of one shop they passed. Papa pointed to the silver paper money displayed at another and explained its use for idol worship.

"Where is the Gospel hall?" he asked of a bystander.

"Follow me, I'll show you," he volunteered eagerly.

In response to their knocking, a pock-marked face peered through the gate and the portals swung wide. "*Tamen lai liao,*" the fellow shouted, grinning widely. He reached for the stuff inside the waiting cart. "They've come!"

"At last, at last!" Mr. Crawford greeted them, his manner and appearance faintly reminiscent of pictures of the patriarch Abraham. "What a Christmas present after all these years!"

The newcomers eyed the bleak surroundings curiously. There was nothing to indicate any kind of festivities. The grey brick walls seemed to close in upon them. Mr. Crocker's eyes darted about as if looking for some exit or bit of greenery.

"They haven't been here long enough to add the homelike touches they had in Tengchow," Papa said. Then, turning to Mrs. Crawford, who loomed behind her husband, "Your home there was like an oasis in the desert to me when I saw it two years ago."

Mrs. Crawford's padded garments emphasized her bulk and kept her arms slightly outstretched. But there was no stiffness in the broad smiles of welcome. She introduced the Bostick family and the Leagues. "Now we're a dozen, counting the Kings in Buh Go. That's as many as the Lord started with."

Papa watched his companions. How would they react? He couldn't rid himself of a deep sense of responsibility for them. The Chinese loved this matriarchal atmosphere, but would these young disciples? *We'll keep things strictly democratic,* he vowed to himself. He shook hands warmly with Bostick and held out his hands to the baby, who ducked behind his father. "Wait till I bring out that stick candy! All the way from America it's come!"

Mrs. Bostick laughed. "He doesn't know what candy is. The native stuff is full of germs, you know."

That night Dr. Crawford read, in the light of a guttering red candle, the story of the Nativity from the Gospel of Luke. In the absence of holiday trappings, the familiar words took on added significance and lent an incredible sense of immediacy across the span of two thousand years.

"For the first time in my life I can imagine how Mary must have felt," Mr. Blalock said, and his voice faded as if in soliloquy. "At home things are outdated in a decade. Here," and he waved a hand significantly, "here—the thought frightens and excites me strangely—well, it's as if time has stopped."

But in the following weeks, decision after decision crowded in upon the little group with illusion-shattering urgency. "We can't stay here any more than we could in our dearly-loved home in Tengchow," Mrs. Crawford said. "The natives won't begin to understand why there's a division between our work and that of the Foreign Mission Board. We've maintained that loyalties should be to the Lord first, to humans second. Now we're being forced to put our theories to the test."

"Mrs. Feng, the gatekeeper's wife, took our leaving hard," Mr. Crawford said. "She wept inconsolably. My wife tried to tell her that others would be coming to take over the work. 'But others won't be my mother,' she wailed."

"We should get far enough away from other missions that our converts won't be subject to the lure of foreign dollars," Papa said. "At least until they are fully established."

"How are you going to know when a convert *is* fully established?" Mr. Royall asked.

Dr. Crawford laughed ruefully. "That's the big question. The only thing we know is that the roots of Christianity, like those of trees, require time to make their way into the subsoil. And here is where Western impatience does the greatest damage." He turned to his wife. "Tell them about Mung."

It seems that Mung Ki-wha was a descendant of the great philosopher, Mencius. He lived about twelve miles from Tengchow and traveled the distance cheerfully to attend the services. His first contact with the mission had followed a raid by bandits, who took both his hoarded savings and a concubine. The Crawfords had offered him a temporary refuge. Slowly his interest in their philosophy had deepened until, in time, he asked for and received baptism.

A son who'd become moderately wealthy in Manchuria hadn't bothered to concern himself with his father's plight after the robbery—not until Mrs. Mung sent word that her husband had eaten the poison of foreign religion. Dr. and Mrs. Crawford happened to be visiting in the home the day the son returned. He saluted his parents and strode out the rear door of the home in a visible fury.

Mrs. Mung was extremely perturbed.

The next day the son brought a maternal uncle and other relatives to apply pressure on the wayward father.

"You are a descendant of Mencius, and this—this religion is everywhere spoken against."

"Our venerated ancestor would no doubt have accepted the religion of Jesus, had it been presented to him. It is good, and true."

"So it may be," the spokesman admitted. "But you can't do this publicly to your family. Take your book back to the teacher and follow the religion privately."

"No, Pastor Crawford receives men into his church but doesn't thrust them out. I will hold to both."

Mr. Mung's relatives all fell to their knees, kowtowing and praying in rare condescension. The son wept and pleaded. Two married daughters were brought to add to the confusion, but one of them was so impressed with her father's stand that she refused to badger him longer. "Let him alone," she said. "I think I should like to become a Christian, too."

She was hastily dismissed. Finally, the son went into convulsions and fell to the ground foaming at the mouth, his whole body rigid.

"He's dying," Mrs. Mung screamed. "He's dying. You must recant!" The excitement had brought in scores of the neighbors, who stared in frank amazement. It was generally understood that, when a position became so offensive as to create a general uproar, it must be yielded. Like a furious jay, swooping and screaching at a marauding cat, she flew at her husband. "Your stubbornness will kill your only son," she screamed.

Mr. Mung finally yielded, and everything became quiet. The son rose from the ground, fully recovered. Relatives and friends returned complacently to their homes.

The following day, while Mr. Mung was at work, the son started to burn his father's books.

"No," his mother said firmly. "I dare not allow that. Your father is a lamb when unprovoked, but a tiger when his anger is aroused."

And on Sunday, instead of going to the field, the father again took down his Bible and began to read.

"I told you so! I told you he didn't mean to keep his promise!"

"No," replied the old man firmly. "Never. Having once obtained eternal life, do you think I will throw it away?"

Mr. Blalock was visibly impressed by the little story.

"And he remained one of the church members? Bully for him! That's what I've always maintained. Christianity isn't an opiate, it's—it's starch. Puts backbone where it belongs."

"Yes," Mrs. Crawford said thoughtfully, "but it's always bothered me that he gave in at all. Compromise never seems to bother the Chinese!"

Dr. Crawford stroked his beard thoughtfully. "It's hard to conceive of a *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* here. Issues nowadays are seldom so clear-cut. But the fact remains that Mung *and* his wife are now loyal Christians. They couldn't be paid to go back on their Lord in anything that matters."

"I like the metaphor of the backbone," Papa said. "We Americans admire decisiveness, and so do the Chinese, really. But a backbone isn't rigid. It gives under certain circumstances." He laughed. "But don't ask me under *what* circumstances."

In the weeks that followed there was plenty of need for backbone. There was little else to sustain their sagging spirits at times. Papa and Mr. Crocker traveled in the populous district around the sacred mountain of Tai Shan, looking for a place to rent.

"Walls, walls, walls!" Mr. Crocker burst out once, "I think I'm going to succumb to claustrophobia if we don't find some place not so hemmed in."

Word came finally of a house available in a town some fifty miles north. The Crawfords packed up their belongings and made the trip by *shientze* (mule litter), only to find that the threat of renting to foreigners had been used to raise the price of the property in a long-delayed sale.

In February, Papa returned, bringing word of success in leasing a former bean-oil factory in Tai An Fu, at the foot of the famous sacred mountain. But the day they were to leave, Mrs. Feng arrived. She'd hobbled on her bound feet all the way from Tengchow to find her dear friends, the Crawfords.

The missionaries eyed the shabby stumps that passed for feet. "But you can't follow us," Mrs. Crawford said. "The rumor will grow that we've kidnaped you."

Mrs. Feng shrugged her shoulders hopelessly. "Who will kidnap the dead? If I return, I will die."

She was deaf and even more infirm than the ailing Mrs. Crawford, but she stood the journey stoically. Arrived in Tai An, she clucked about the compound like a mother hen, making it hard to say who was keeping whom. Every day she chattered with the passing merchants as she shooed away the dogs, chickens, and children who turned up continuously to stare curiously at every move of the foreigners. Once she took a stick to a gang of street urchins who'd swarmed over the crumbling walls in the rear of the compound.

"If only she could cook, or make a bed, or even wash the dishes, there'd be more reason to have her around," Mrs. Crawford complained. She'd brought a tray of tea and sandwiches to the courtyard, where the men had been putting new tile on the roofs and bricking up the rear walls.

Dr. Crawford straightened creakily. "Mrs. Feng? She's as deaf as a doorpost, so why not let her function as one? Actually, can't you see how she provides us with face? She can read the temper of the people in a way that's uncanny. I'd not think of going out on the streets without at least getting her opinion. Otherwise, I wouldn't have known that all the excitement last week meant only that the bannermen from the area were assembling here in order to carry their felicitations to Peking in honor of the Empress' birthday."

"It seems odd to me to be taking our cues from an old woman," Mr. Crocker said, dryly. "Especially when you see how terrified she is of the soldiers when they so much as pass by the gate."

"The whole empire is taking cues from a woman," Dr.

Crawford reminded him. "And for that matter, so is the British Empire. And these two segments of the world make up the majority of the world's population, wouldn't you say? As for fearing the soldiers, all Chinese fear them. If you'd lived in China longer, you'd know why."

Mr. Crocker was keenly interested in the political situation and the view of the senior missionaries regarding it. "Is it jealousy of Queen Victoria that's inspiring the Empress Dowager's hatred of foreigners? The papers in Shanghai were playing up that angle for all it was worth—and more, it seems to me. How can you square Britain's claim to being a Christian nation with the Opium War? It's one thing to force the privilege of trade—but *that!* And what about Japan? Aren't these demands that precipitated the Sino-Japanese War just about what the European nations have been doing for the last thirty years?"

"What a lot of questions for a tenderfoot!" Dr. Crawford laughed. "You're getting the feel of this country's dilemma, and quickly, it seems to me." He sobered. "The Western world has much to answer for. If nations could admit their guilt and be absolved as individual sinners can—well, frankly, I don't know the solution." He shook his head. A brisk wind blew the long white beard against his left shoulder, but the blue eyes burned intensely. "The Western nations are insisting on rights and privileges in China before they've even earned them. You can neither force nor buy a people's trust, you know."

Mrs. Crawford stood, tray in hand. She'd gathered the cups but seemed too involved in the discussion to tear herself away. "You didn't say what you think about the Empress. How can foreign nations win the trust of this country with a woman like that, ready to blast every move her people make toward conciliation? *I* say it's her jealousy that's causing most of the trouble."

"She's not jealous; she's afraid. What does she know about things outside the Middle Kingdom? What does she *want* to know? Nothing. She'd be happy if only the other nations would let her alone! Her back is already to the wall. Even her Manchu supporters admit it. And when you're afraid—well, you know what that does to people! She fears the predatory instincts of the Western nations only slightly less than those of Japan. And now her armies are disintegrating from internal corruption. It will be only a matter of time until she admits defeat. And none of her followers wants to run the risk of a false guess in the event of her demise." He sighed. "How much of China will come under the Japanese flag will probably be determined by Russia, China's neighbor to the west. It's a dark picture, isn't it?"

"Is that the way the natives see it?" Mr. Crocker asked.

"I wish I knew. You talk to a Chinese gentleman and he courteously refrains from giving voice to his distrust of your honorable land, no matter how dishonorably he may think your country has acted. You talk to a soldier and he gives you the sort of bravado that's expected of him, though he might desert his allegiance overnight. Little does he know what he's fighting for other than the preservation of his own life at the moment. That's why he loots and rapes and kills even his own people. Why, he doesn't even know whom he's fighting, really. Only those who've become one with us in the sincere love of the truth of God can talk the same language. A man that's born again is born honest. But we're in the minority both here and at home, alas!"

Mr. Crocker picked up his trowel. "Looks as if the only way to make a good citizen of any country on earth is to fit him for citizenship in heaven, doesn't it?"

The men resumed their work. Papa thought it unnecessary to replace the bits of glass that had once crested the masonry. But Mrs. Crawford thought the fine line between faith and presumption was illustrated by just such seemingly irrelevant details. "After all, the men who put glass there once probably had good reason to want the added protection."

"Yes," her husband said. "But how else are we to demonstrate our belief in the friendliness of our neighbors than by taking just such risks? I don't think we're being foolhardy."

In the end it was agreed that the wall alone would be enough. After all, no wall built was high enough to protect one from every contingency, as China could well attest. One's security depended on other, more intangible bulwarks.

One night several weeks later, the little group found themselves surrounded. Soldiers had overrun the inns and swarmed into every available shelter, commandeering food, women, or whatever they desired. A hundred or more settled like noisy crows in the compound adjoining that of the missionaries. Respect for Dr. Crawford's venerable beard had probably been all that had deterred the soldiers from taking over the home of the foreigners, too.

Papa and Mr. Crocker, aware of the host of ills that seemed to come from the icy chill of the February nights, had been taking turns feeding the fires in the *k'angs* (brick beds). The noise next door was unabated as Papa came out one midnight. Still in the shadow of the tiled roofs, he was startled to see two well-padded figures, outlined by the moonlight, perched upon the wall that had once been in question. He froze into the shadows.

"Perhaps these are the people we are fighting with. Let's kill them now," said one.

"No, they aren't the ones," his companion replied.

Papa braced himself. Should he sound the alarm to Crocker? He remembered what Crawford had said about these fellows. They really *didn't* know whom they were fighting! For a long moment he held his breath.

Finally the men jumped back on the other side of the dividing wall.

No chronicle of daily events could have conveyed fully these dramatic moments with their overtones of uncertainty, hope, and even fear. Much less could the stark monotony of the days have been communicated to the Western world. Few people in America had experienced a comparable bleakness or known the taste of discouragement that permeated everything here, like the dust from the Gobi Desert. For that reason, perhaps, friends in the homeland just weren't equipped to understand the drive that motivated these stalwarts. Pity was easy to excite, but that was the last thing they wanted.

In a happy solution to the problem of hemispheric communication, Papa quoted Scripture in frequent letters to the *Recorder*. "When you look upon the multitudes, you understand our feeling of urgency," he wrote. "I can now realize something of what was meant in the words describing our Lord as being 'moved with compassion.' *Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel.*"

Often the missionaries were absent from home for weeks at a time, visiting from four to seven villages a day and speaking to groups in their courtyards at night. Occasionally a villager would offer hospitality, but more often the wayfarers slept in the crude inns of the larger towns.

It was no problem to attract attention. But how divert it into worth-while channels? The supply of tact and ingenuity must never run low. The foreigner must develop a sixth sense to know when his "heavenly doctrine" would be as welcome to the ears as bird songs in spring and when it would be as ill-timed as thunder at harvest. The conversations usually began with things familiar.

"Do you know who holds the sun in the sky and makes it rise and set unfailingly?"

Or perhaps the fields would be bright with promise of a good harvest. "Look at the growing crops. Have you ever thought to thank the Heavenly Father for the rain that makes the *kao liang* (grain sorghum) grow?"

Sometimes a mother would speak of a dead child, and so give opportunity to tell of One who gathered little children in His arms, or to explain His promise of a happier life to come.

L. S. Foster's book, *Fifty Years in China*, quotes his sister, Mrs. Crawford, as follows:

> We can recall many instances of kind consideration. . . . Once when [we] were almost exhausted from heat and labor, a man suddenly presented himself before us bearing a tray of smoking tea. "I knew you must need something to drink," he

said. Sometimes a loving old woman would take us by the hand and say, "Come in and rest, this is hard work you are doing for us." At one time a lady of wealth sent an invitation for us to come to her house for rest and refreshments which we accepted, and we found her unusually intelligent and interesting. "I have great respect," she said, "for those who are spending their lives teaching others to be good. You are like our own sage, Confucius, who went in his cart from village to village exhorting the people to morality." Sometimes malicious persons would excite public sentiment against us, and in such places we found it useless to attempt religious work. Again venerable old men with flowing white beard[s] would approach and thank us warmly for teaching their people such good things. The Chinese are not all alike.

However bleak the life and matter-of-fact the reports of these days, one conclusion was evident. These pioneers seemed to feel that their spiritual satisfactions—nebulous though they might seem to Westerners—far outweighed their tribulations, whether with or without sympathy from across the sea.

Mr. Crocker was beginning to talk with some fluency by the time it was decided to leave Tai An to the Crawfords and open a branch of the work in Chining Chow. Presbyterian missionaries were having to curtail the work in that sprawling city, and they welcomed the prospect of help from any quarter, even the Baptists. In fact, only in the homeland did the denominational lines seem unduly significant. Here, there was too much to do to haggle.

Again, Papa and Mr. Crocker set to work making a home under the tip-tilted tile roofs of a native dwelling. The tedium of the drab life seemed even more deadly than the occasional excursions and alarums. There was little but work and more work to be done. Papa kept his mornings filled with study of the Mandarin dialect, new to him, but classic in its applications.

He and Mr. Crocker took turns supervising the cook in his duties. But with the suave aplomb of the Oriental, he managed to slide out from under most of their directives.

Everything seemed to accentuate painfully their celibate condition. Mr. Crocker wrote fervid letters to a certain lady in faraway Alabama and was dejected when she wrote that her doctor felt her health too delicate to stand frontier life. Sometimes Papa wondered briefly if he'd made a mistake in turning down "Miss Willie's" kind offer. There were no mails from the coast, but messengers occasionally brought in packets of letters and magazines from an agent in Shanghai, along with driblets of money, which had to be dutifully acknowledged.

Letters from home were their chief delight. Manly wrote often.

DEAR PAPA,

Dan gave me this pen and I am writing with it. I was glad to get your letter. I would like to go over and stay with you some. We keep the weeds off the graves. Last week we went to the Springs.

Your loving boy,
MANLY

The Gospel Mission issue often claimed space in the religious periodicals, but being so long delayed in transit, Papa's answers seldom kindled the interest that had been evident in the homeland while he was there in person.

"Brother Herring says, 'If a missionary starves, let him starve!' What folly is this?" gasped a constituent.

To which, long after the brother had caught his breath, Papa replied, "He who said, 'Let justice be done, if the heavens fall,' didn't mean to express fears about the heavens falling!"

"Why did Brother Herring kick against the Board? Wasn't he given a good place and treated well?"

By the time Papa's rebuttal appeared, the question was completely forgotten. "I'm not kicking against the Board. Is having a good place and being treated well all we want? God forbid! While the churches at home are doing relatively little, and the heathen dying and going to hell, while the command of our Master is not fulfilled, loyalty to boards and conventions is good, but loyalty to Christ is better."

Far removed from the barren scenes so familiar to Papa and his companions, the home constituency apparently preferred the dim religious light of formalism. They asked wearily, "Is such controversy necessary?"

"Conflict is responsible for our national independence," Papa replied. "Conflict is an important element of the Bible.

Must I be carried to the skies
  On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize
  And sailed through bloody seas?

The first year of the venture was drawing to a close when a batch of mail arrived from America. Papa tore open the letter from Ma, first of all.

George had fever when he reached home. You know how the boys loved to ride the train and how excited they were to visit their grandparents in Mount Airy. When Aunt Bettie tried to get him to promise not to put his head out of the train window, he stoutly refused to promise. "Yes, I will!" he insisted. Where did he get his stubbornness? We just couldn't get the medicine down him. But perhaps that is what saved his life, who knows?

Manly was too quiet and thoughtful. He didn't want to go to bed at first, but took his medicine dutifully. "Somehow I just don't enjoy things like I used to," he said when I asked him what was the matter. Then, like an old man, "That barn door needs fixin'. It hangs crooked and won't stay shut."

We didn't tell him he had typhoid, but he probably guessed it. "Don't tell Papa I'm sick; he'll work himself to death."

His last words were, "Hasn't Papa come yet?"

Papa dropped the letter numbly, pushing aside the others. Vaguely he knew what they were—letters of condolence—efforts to reach across in sympathy. There was one from the Foreign Mission Board, of course. But first he had to get hold of himself. He had to be alone, away from Crocker, the servants, and the ever-prying eyes of the Chinese. He dropped the letter from the Board in Crocker's lap and went out through the courtyard into the narrow street with its motley crowd of restless humanity, its beasts of burden and produce, out to where the November winds ruffled the brown waters of the Grand Canal, looking anything but grand at this end of its existence.

Hunched against the wind, he strode for hours, as nearly alone as he could get in this land of teeming miseries. . . .

One of the letters was from Great-Aunt Lizzie. It was reproduced in the little booklet Papa wrote later called *A Manly Boy*. She wrote:

> I can't mention this incident without tears, for I feel so sorry for you, his father. So promising a child was he! Something he did for our home in one day that I'd tried for years to accomplish. He took his place at the table once while spending a few days with us, and waited for someone to ask the blessing. When we began to eat without it, he excused himself, saying he wasn't hungry. At supper his uncle commenced to wait on him, but he refused again. My heart swelled with pride as I saw his purpose. "Why don't you ask the blessing?" he asked.
>
> "Oh, it's just a form and don't make any difference," his uncle replied. But you could tell it *was* making a difference for some reason.
>
> "Please ask the blessing," Manly said. His uncle tried to laugh it off, urging him to eat.
>
> "I don't want to eat until the blessing is asked," he said, turning to me.
>
> I agreed to do it if his uncle would do so the next morning. So he helped us to set our house in order. I never told it because he disliked hearing his actions spoken of.

Papa's letter to the lonely grandparents, traveling the long distance between them in "only five weeks," bore the single request: "Have these words of his engraved on his tombstone: 'Papa, I love God better than you, now!' "

The Chinese character for the word "faith" pictures a man standing by his word. It brings to mind the unsurpassed imagery of the Bible by which Papa lived. *He shall be like a tree planted.* Storms might rock and sun might scorch the branches, but the taproot of Papa's loyalty dug its way inexorably through the shallow soil of devotion to causes and issues, no matter how noble, to the surer devotion to a Person—and that Person the Son of God. All had taken place underground, of course. The world had seen nothing spectacular: *He bringeth forth his fruit in his season: his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*

And the work did prosper. Not spectacularly, but surely. From the first hearers were winnowed those who formed the little church of sturdy believers, willing to prove their profession with no enticements given. Here, in this city of 150,000 people which was to be Papa's home for the next thirteen years, it seemed that missionaries Crocker and Herring had at last succeeded in establishing a work that would endure.

CHAPTER 9

Romance On the Grand Canal

*E*arly in 1896, Papa decided he'd go down the Grand Canal to Shanghai. He had some important business to attend to. Mindful as always of finances, he'd figured to combine colportage downstream with his personal affairs and so kill two birds with one stone, so to speak. There was no law against that.

"Why a trip to Shanghai at this time of the year?" Crocker asked. "Sure, we've had a lot of snow here, but you'll freeze on that boat in the damp Shanghai climate."

"Are you expecting some reinforcements?" the newly arrived Methodist missionaries asked politely.

Apparently their isolation from others of their race had created a climate of mutual concern which was beginning to irk Papa's free spirit.

"I need some toothpicks," Papa replied gravely, but the twinkle in his eye was more convincing than his gravity.

Immediately after arriving in Shanghai he called on Mr. and Mrs. Letchworth, hosts at the home for missionary transients. There he could learn much about new personnel of the denominations represented in China. Really he was borrowing from the wisdom of the Orient. In matters of importance the Chinese always consulted a middleman, and Papa felt he should be no less circumspect.

Mrs. Letchworth received him cordially enough. She was used to missionaries from the interior with their Chinese shoes and padded garments. And the whole community had been moved to sympathy by the disasters that had plagued Papa and his family.

In the Victorian elaborateness of the home, Papa felt suddenly awkward with his cap on, though it helped to make his queue less conspicuous. Perfectly appropriate in Shantung, it posed a problem in etiquette here among his fellows. To doff or not to doff, that was the question.

Mrs. Letchworth laughed gaily and, instead of extending her hand, bowed ceremoniously, setting him instantly at ease. She seated herself and motioned him to a chair.

"The Lord sent out his disciples two and two, you remember," Papa remarked, crossing his long legs casually. But his fingers drummed quietly on the arm of the chair. Papa had the strong fingers of a man who liked to work with his hands, but they were slender like those of the native calligraphers—slender and sensitive.

"You are working with a Mr. Crocker, as I remember?"

Papa cleared his throat. "Yes, but that wasn't the oldest arrangement in the Bible, really."

"No?" Mrs. Letchworth smiled, but gave him little help. Perhaps she had no idea what he was driving at.

He leaned forward suddenly grinning. "Who, in your estimation, is the best lady-missionary hereabout?"

"If that's what you want to know, it's Miss Alice Rea, from Sydney, Australia. She knows her Bible as few preachers do." Something in the way she emphasized the words seemed to show that Mrs. Letchworth was capable of putting anyone, even a clergyman, in his place. "She's had a year's training as a nurse, she sings like Melba, and she plays the organ at the Union Church, to the delight of the music-starved people here." Mrs. Letchworth laughed at her own enthusiasm and shook her head. "But you'll never get her. She's Episcopalian. Baptist and Episcopalian? Never do! Like East and West, you know. Never the twain shall meet."

"But when I show up in church, Sunday, you *will* introduce me, won't you?" Papa rose to his feet, satisfied at the challenge.

He showed up in church the following Sunday and sat where he could get a good view of the organist. In the solemn light from the stained glass windows he noted that, in addition to the virtues quoted, she had brown eyes, curly black hair, and a certain sparkle in her bearing in spite of the awkward movement of her feet at the pedals.

Papa began a whirlwind courtship. It was like nothing Alice had ever known and left her somewhat breathless. "Three things I've always said I'd never do," she said a few days later, "marry a widower, a Baptist, or an American!"

"Oh, well! No one's going to condemn you for your provincialism," Papa said magnanimously. "Circumstances alter cases, don't they?"

Alice put up quite an argument, which in itself must have been highly significant. "I can't cook," she said, and of course used the broad *a* and the cavernous double *o*.

"I can hire a cook," Papa replied grandly.

"I can't sew."

"Who said anything about wanting a seamstress?"

"They say you'll take me to the interior and we'll starve."

Papa caught the significance of the "we" and pounced upon it. He sensed correctly that she, too, had tired of the superficiality of Shanghai and was truly in sympathy with the cause he'd espoused.

When the engagement was announced there was no small stir among the foreigners of the community.

"If you want to know what *I* think," Miss Hallie said repeatedly, without being asked her opinion at all, "if you want to know what I think: Alice doesn't know the difference between pity and love." Miss Hallie was Alice's roommate. Built and equipped like a steam roller, she functioned in much the same manner. She borrowed Alice's clothes, though several sizes smaller than hers, and calmly assumed a superior wisdom, along with license to act as mentor and mouthpiece. "All Shanghai has been moved to pity for Mr. Herring in the tragic loss of his family, but that's no basis for a marriage."

"I scarcely see how Miss Hallie can be much of an expert on marriage," Papa remarked testily when Alice relayed this bit of acumen. He tilted her face upward and his eyes narrowed. "You don't like her either, do you?"

Alice blushed and tried to evade his bluntness. "Well, I—I— Of course I like her," she hedged. "She gets on my nerves someti—"

"O.K. That's fine. We're agreed; we don't like her. Some missionaries seem to get the notion that we have to *like* people as well as love them—in the Biblical sense, of course." He grinned. It was evident that loving in the extra-Biblical sense had never been in question between them.

"It's just that Mother has always tried to help me see that adjusting to a difficult person might be a means of grace."

"A means of grace! Whatever does that mean?"

"Oh, you know—" she waved her hands in a gesture of frustration. But Papa enjoyed watching her flounder and blush. He did nothing to help her self-expression.

She frowned in deep concentration. "When you learn to live above the petty annoyances of another person—a difficult person, perhaps—you've grown into a better Christian!"

Papa's arm tightened about her and he roared with laughter. "Have you now? In that case, Miss Hallie has unconsciously been my ally, eh?"

He rose from the stiff sofa and strode to the bookcase, drew out an anthology of British poets, and leafed through it. "Here it is! Here's the answer to Miss Hallie. Old Alexander Pope said it better than your mother, and all you need is to read 'his' instead of 'her' as it applies here. Nothing like a bit of satire to add spice to life, I say."

Alice read the lines, her face a study in amused tolerance of Papa's foolishness and disinclination to be characterized as embracing vice, even in metaphor.

> Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
> As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;
> Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
> We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

"Give me a try; you might grow accustomed sooner than you think!" Papa said, grinning.

There was no doubt about it: faint heart never would have won fair lady and, though Papa had his faults, faintheartedness was never one of them.

"You'll have to write to Mother," Alice had insisted, not unaware that the little community was being pleasantly titillated by the romance, to the point (if they'd approved of a little gambling) of laying odds for and against the success of Papa's suit.

"Not your father?"

"Not Father. He's much too engrossed in his music. Mother always takes care of important decisions anyway."

Thus it was that, after his return to Chining, Papa's campaign took to the mails, which were, at best, not too co-operative in their slow meandering down the Canal—to say nothing of the long voyage beyond the equator.

"I don't want you to become a Baptist just because I'm one," Papa wrote Alice. "I've heard what an excellent Bible student you are. How about rereading Matthew 3 and Romans 6?"

Again she wasn't too hard to convince. She also wrote a long letter to Sydney: a letter to her rector, full of (what seemed to her, at least) very convincing arguments.

Papa chuckled when he read that part of her letter to Crocker. "Wouldn't you like to see the reverend's expression when he sees that?"

But they ran into difficulties with the Baptists, too. And this time Papa's expression was grim as he sensed the bewilderment in Alice's letter.

> I decided to ask the Reverend _____ to baptize me, since I knew you held him in high esteem, in spite of your differences in the matter of mission methods. I was prepared to answer strict questions about doctrines, but completely aghast at his action. He asked me if, when I returned to Australia, I'd take communion with my mother. I told him, certainly I would: Mother's the best Christian I know in any denomination. And then he refused to baptize me! Imagine that! I fail to see how any such action is taught in the Scriptures to which you referred me."

(In fairness to the brother, it should be noted that, in later years, he humbly apologized to my parents for a stand that he had since repudiated.)

Papa flushed and read the letter through again. This was carrying Baptist distinctiveness a little too far, much as he believed in it. In fact, it's doubtful if he'd ever seen this particular tenet (close communion) in so harsh a light before. Like the physical nuisances so well advertized in later years, could there be a spiritual fustiness about Baptists that even their best friends didn't mention? If so, it needed mentioning. No wonder Baptists were often resented by their fellow Christians!

Papa could not hide his embarrassment as he read the letter to Crocker. "Can you beat that? You know what I think? He's hitting back at me for leaving the Board."

Papa paced the floor angrily. "Why didn't he face me himself? If there's anything I hate, it's cowardice!"

Crocker thought some measure of disillusionment was inevitable and only what Alice might do with it was important. "So he's something less than the gentleman we Baptists claim to be? I hope she doesn't let that bother her. Isn't it well to remember that Baptists are always being resented for a perfection to which they never lay claim? Isn't it well to remember that we were human before we were ever Baptists, and that becoming a Baptist or an Episcopalian doesn't mean that we cease to be human?" He laughed shortly. "We're fortunate that the Chinese don't think in the absolute like Westerners do. *Kuo yo kuo fa; chia yo chia fa.*"

Papa knew what the proverb meant. *Each country has its laws; each family its regulations*—it's well to make allowances. Quietly he and Alice deferred the matter of her baptism until after their marriage, which was now set for the seventh of April. Papa debated the matter of cutting his queue for the ceremony, since he'd be wearing foreign clothes again, but decided against it. Worn under the skull cap, it was inconspicuous and would be a nuisance to grow again. The problem of uniting two nationalities, however, was a little more complicated. Neither the British nor the American consular attaché would agree to disaccommodate himself in order to attend a single ceremony for two mere missionaries. So Papa was married in the morning ceremony and Alice in the afternoon. And a picture taken on the lawn of the British consulate registered the dignified approval of Mr. and Mrs. Letchworth and eight of Alice's closest friends.

The bride's dress of native silk moire had the tight bodice, huge leg-o'-mutton sleeves, and short train of the period, heavily undergirded with tucks and handmade lace. The only sour note in the scene was the tearful expression of one of the flower girls, who leaned disconsolately against the bride's knee. Papa had surmounted his tonsorial difficulty by letting the front part of his hair grow to European length. When brushed back in a brisk pompadour, it almost hid the small cap and minimized the embarrassment he always felt at wearing a cap—any kind of cap—in church.

Papa at once assumed the job of manager, somehow implying that the success of Alice's previous independence of action had been a miracle unlikely of repetition. In the manner of her contemporaries, Alice never challenged the role Papa assumed. Actually, she was intensely practical, except in the matter of finding her way through crooked Chinese streets alone.

"Just let me walk behind one of those spirit walls into a Chinese home, and the four points of the compass have a way of getting jumbled up," she'd explain. "East seems like west and north like south, and someone just *has* to set me straight."

But there was slight chance of her getting lost on the houseboat up the river and canal to Chining Chow. She tried to be a good sport about the fleas, the dampness, the close communion with the crew, and the ever-present smells. But when Papa brought in one day, as a special treat, a boiled sweet potato he'd found in a village market, she recoiled.

"Must I eat it?"

"I don't see how you can learn to like them otherwise," he said dryly.

On the other hand, Papa had to make a few concessions to his bride, too. The first time he'd come to the evening meal in the same *kwa-tze* that he'd been wearing all day, she raised her eyebrows.

Papa, grinning, laid down his chopsticks and bowl and changed to a crisp new garment. "Seems like we're a long way from civilization—our civilization, at least!" he protested mildly. "What was it Henry V said to his bride? 'We are the makers of manners,' and something about not having to uphold the 'nice fashion' of her country."

"But we are neither king nor queen," Alice retorted, and Papa was enchanted with the way she said the long *i* in "neither."

"We may not be the king or queen, but we can see the Chutzulin Mountains if we care to, and they couldn't," Papa said with his usual insouciance. "But of course, we'll have to stay at an inn, and that's worse than the houseboat."

"Mountains?" Alice's eyes narrowed in reminiscence. "How I have missed the lovely Katoomba! We used to spend a fortnight there every summer. Does China have anything half so lovely?" The boatman's wife sidled in to remove the dishes on the little table before them. She was scarcely noticed. There was a wistful light in Alice's eyes. "There were the 'Three Sisters,' named by the aborigines Meeni, Wimlah, and Gunedoo, who were changed to stone for their misdeeds, according to the legends. Nothing was lovelier than the mists around the 'Ruined Castle,' another rock formation we used to hike miles to see. Have you ever watched a tree fern against a sea of white cloud?"

Papa shook his head.

"Oh, it was so lovely, and the eucalyptus, the Christmas ash, and the wattle!" She laughed. "We used to picnic at Echo Point and *cooo-eeee* to the four points of the compass and listen for the multiplied echoes to come piling back at us teasingly."

"Beautiful!" Papa said, his eyes on her animated face against the sombre backdrop of the river. "Let's see what China has to offer, shall we?"

When the boat docked at Chinkiang, Papa slipped off to confer with some Presbyterian missionaries he'd known on his former journeys. Would they witness the ceremony of Alice's baptism?

"Sure," they said. "Sure, we'll be glad to come, and we'll ask the native Christians, too. Is there a better way to demonstrate our oneness in Christ?"

On the following Sunday afternoon the missionaries and native Christians gathered about a quiet cove of the Yangtze River and watched the two walk into the waters together. Alice wore the native garments, part of her trousseau, made in the long wide-sleeved style appropriate in the northern provinces. As usual, a crowd had gathered, gaping at what bid fair to be something terribly exciting. Children chattered from their perches in the trees. A cormorant fisherman edged his boat and noisy birds closer, questioning an acquaintance ashore about the strange proceedings.

This was no captive audience schooled in decorous behavior according to Western standards, but Papa asked for nothing better. Here was a chance to demonstrate the faith he'd staked his life on. As was the Founder, so would he be alert to teach by any means at hand.

Alice's eyes clung to his face. She felt lost without the trappings of religion as she had known it. She missed the soft music of an organ, the dim light filtering through stained glass. Bits of debris and bubbles eddied slowly past them. What else besides her toes was alive in the mud below the murky waters?

Papa read the bafflement evident in her solemn eyes and the white lines about her lips. He folded her hands against her bosom and clasped them firmly. "It's not a pretty service, perhaps, but it's beautiful. You'll see," he said quietly.

Then he spoke in Chinese, and clearly the words carried over the waters. Death? What Chinese didn't know about death? Burial? That, too, was familiar; terribly, terribly familiar. Resurrection? Something like transmigration, perhaps? Rising to a new life? Ah, here was something to feed the hopes of the frustrated. Here was something understood better in this environment than in the cathedrals of the West. His tongue savored the simplicity of the words, *to walk in newness of life.*

He raised his hand, lowered it, and for a moment there was the swish of waters opening and closing again, and the triumphant emergence. He steadied her with his hand as they plodded, dripping, from the stream, his eyes drawn to the rapt dedication in hers. For the first time he seemed to realize the extent of her commitment, and his hand trembled. In the privacy of their own houseboat again, he lovingly kissed her.

"All I can say is, I'll do all in my power to make you never regret it," he said simply.

Tears brimmed in the large brown eyes. "There'll be no regrets," she answered firmly.

The following day, after a long wearying hike through feathery bamboo forests, they found refuge of a sort at an inn. It was not too crowded at this season of the year. The farmers were busy putting out their rice, and the merchants from the coast had not yet fled the humid summer ills. Papa ordered quantities of hot water delivered to their room, partitioned from the noisy communal room that opened on the street. The paper-covered lattice work kept out little of the clamor, however. Alice set about brushing her hair and washing off the day's grime.

She wrung out the washcloth and looked around for a place to hang it. "What are you going to do about that peeping Tom?" she asked. "He's got himself a hole, and his eye hasn't left it for a moment. Will you complain to the innkeeper?"

"He might be the innkeeper himself," Papa said. "No, I'll take care of things. Just keep on talking." He eased himself casually around the room until he stood directly in front of the offender. Then he whirled and popped his finger through the hole and into the offending orb. There was a raucous burst of laughter from the adjoining room.

"David!" Alice expostulated, giggling in spite of herself.

"Sometimes you can't always tell," Papa drawled in a phrase that was to grow exceedingly familiar whenever he'd put himself in a hot spot. "Sometimes you can't always tell" (and here he'd pause to shift gears from the sublime to the ridiculous), "you can't always tell just *what* language to use. But I think he got the point, don't you?"

Their boat had been anchored temporarily in a small cove near the entrance of the Grand Canal to the Yangtze. The trackers considered the foreigners fair sport to watch. This they could do without pausing in their gambling. Apparently no one was in any hurry to bring the journey to a close, the boatmen least of all. In the mornings Papa and Alice studied their Chinese Bibles with many discussions of the different tones which she was soon to be learning. Together they consulted what few authorities they had on the subtle meanings so hard to grasp without a native scholar. She was quicker than he to catch the implications. But Papa fretted over what he felt were inadequacies in the translation.

"They should have taken it straight from the Greek," he complained. "And they should have read the Chinese classics for a couple of hundred years first."

"But how in the world—" Alice's practical mind was always tripping on his absurdities. In a way, she was always asking for his teasing. But Papa'd give it, whether she asked for it or not.

"I may not have the musical education you have, but I bet I can do what you can't do. Just tap out any tune you want and I can tell you what you're playing."

Taking up the challenge, Alice seriously began tapping out the sextette from "Lucia." She had yet to learn that Papa's knowledge of opera was as bleak as that of most of his contemporaries in faraway Dixie. During their courtship in Shanghai, Papa had been delighted to find how

much the group of expatriates there enjoyed Alice's singing, but he'd been completely unaware of the limitations of his own musical background as compared with hers. Tosti's "Good-bye to Summer" and a popular number called "The Dear Home Land" had been great favorites. But when he had wanted her to try some of his choices, the titles drew a blank expression to her face.

"Haven't you ever heard 'Listen to the Mocking Bird'?"

"No-o-o. Is it something like 'Hark, Hark, the Lark'?"

No doubt about it. Some phases of their differing backgrounds were going to make life interesting, if not downright difficult.

Papa's blue eyes looked thoughtful all the while she tapped out the rhythm. The caged chickens, crowded against piles of rope and cabbage on the weatherbeaten catwalk, cocked their heads and eyed them quizzically, blinking when she finished with a flourish.

"There," she said. "You'll be doing jolly well to guess that!"

Papa nodded. "Um-m!" he mused. "That *is* a bit difficult." His face brightened. "Oh, I know. You're playing the fool!"

Her face went blank before she broke into laughter. (Papa always said she had a British-delayed sense of humor.) She pushed him playfully, but firmly enough to make him grab the gunwale.

"A bit more of that," she warned, "and you'll be no fish out of water—even if your name *is* Herring!"

CHAPTER 10

Sydney Sojourn

Papa had forewarned her so well about life in the hinterland that Alice was only briefly dismayed as she stood beside him outside the gate of the Chining home in the bright spring moonlight. The coolies breathed heavily and lowered their burdens to ogle at Papa and his bride. Later he was to learn that she, too, was breathless with another sort of challenge, not just the steep ascent from the banks of the canal. Any failure to measure up to the requirements of the pioneer missionary might reflect discredit not only on her Christian testimony but also on her Australian upbringing. But she hid her fears well.

The gate swung open slowly. The cook alternately bobbed and apologized for not knowing of their arrival in advance. He apologized for Mr. Crocker's absence. It even seemed that there was apology in his introduction of his wife and the three stair-step miniatures behind him. The shadows cast by the flickering lantern moved eerily across the hard-packed dirt of the courtyard. Alice peered at the sleepy children and smiled. She was relieved to find that the noise of quarreling came from the adjoining household, not from Papa's servants. The cook's wife clasped her hands together and bowed soberly. The air was heavy with the odor of garlic. Alice hated both onions and garlic, and for a moment she tried not to inhale. Would she ever get used to the smells, or could she eliminate them from her own menage without too much offense?

Standing in the room Papa had used as a study, her trunks and boxes about her, Alice knew another moment of dismay. The box that held her best woolen dresses had absorbed canal water en route and the contents spilled from the waterlogged casing. She held up a navy alpaca, heavily encrusted with mildew.

"I guess that is what the Lord meant when He told us to take joyfully the spoiling of our goods," she said shakily to Papa, who bounded in over the high threshold after having dispatched the coolies with a minimum of dickering.

"Oh, well," Papa said blithely, "I'll have the finest silk and needlework put on your new native garments, and you'll still be the finest lady in the land."

"This is where we sleep?" She pointed to the brick *k'ang* against the outer wall.

"Tomorrow I'll show you how Wang keeps the fires in it from the outside. It *is* a bit hard," he conceded. Then his face brightened. "I'll have a bed made. Native *hwei su,* one of the prettiest woods hereabout. Hemp ropes interlaced will make a bed fit for a queen, really."

A few weeks later Alice invited Mrs. Foster and Miss Straughan of the Methodist mission over for afternoon tea. Papa hovered about, trying to mediate between her and Wang, who not only found her dialect hard to understand but treated her bafflement over playing hostess as an alien tempest in an Oriental teapot.

"Couldn't you just send Wang to the market for some native sesame seed cakes?" Papa asked.

"Don't you like my biscuits?" Alice countered.

"They're fine," Papa said, grinning. "Only they're not biscuits. They're cookies, and nothing under the sun should require so much labor."

"Why didn't I think to bring silver polish?" Alice moaned, surveying the graceful but tarnished silver service that had been a wedding gift from her brother Leonard.

"I'll fix that. Ma used to use wood ash," Papa said and proceeded to show Wang how to dampen the fine ash from the *k'ang* and rub with the paste.

A sudden clamor in the courtyard meant only one thing: guests. A heavy, white-haired woman was crawling out from the matting-canopied litter. Festooned on the poles were enamel cups, a pith helmet, a mesh bag containing several cans of condensed milk, a few patent medicines, and a wooden, humpbacked comb such as the Chinese used.

Papa extended both hands in welcome. "Alice, this is Mrs. Crawford. No one, anywhere, knows the Chinese better or has adapted more valiantly to their ways. Just ask her anything you want to know."

Alice saw the guest serenely ensconced in the room nearest the chapel. "Bring my water pitcher and basin," she said to Wang and blinked in confusion as Mrs. Crawford took over. The conversation flowed around her, much as the Yangtze flowed about the "Little Orphan."

"But she's—she's so dowagerish!" Alice confided to Papa later. "Do the Chinese *like* you to move in and assume authority just like that? Perhaps we'd better call off my tea party. Do you think she'll approve?"

"Nonsense!" Papa snorted. "Don't let anyone push you around—me included," he said, catching her in his arms and giving her a kiss, much to the amusement of Wang and the embarrassment of Alice.

But later when she saw her silver service she broke down and cried. Wang, with the assumption that coal ash was as good as wood, had scrubbed up a fine sheen, marred only slightly—in his estimation—by the surface scratches that slashed across the festooned engravings. His face fell when he saw Teacher-mother's reaction.

"Don't make him lose face," Mrs. Crawford said. "You'll find out soon that no loss is to be compared to that of human dignity."

Alice laughed shakily and bowed her thanks. *"Hao,"* she said to Wang, *"Ding hao!"* But she blinked at the rush of Mandarin, grateful only that Wang's face resumed its original luster, whether the silver ever would or not.

"You'd better set that Dresden china shepherdess and mosaic picture frame out of reach of the children's fingers," Papa suggested, looming tall in the doorway. The flowing skirts he wore, his black satin cap and fully released queue, gave him a dignity she'd seldom seen. "I'll probably preach at the tent until after dark. These crowds at the fair usually stay that long."

"Aren't American children taught manners?" Alice asked.

Papa winked at Mrs. Crawford. "Well, the fact is, sometimes you can't always tell, you know."

"Well, one thing is certain," Alice called as he disappeared behind the "spirit wall." "*Ours* will be, David. Remember that!"

Whatever challenges their new life proposed, David and Alice were both in it very much together. Even the letters to George shared a common piece of ruled paper.

DEAR LITTLE GEORGE,

Are you thinking that it is quite time that "Mother" wrote you a letter again? The picture that I am sending you was painted on rice paper and is of a little Chinese boy giving a letter to a Mandarin who is dressed up with his hat on and his peacocks' feather sticking out behind. That feather is a sign that he is a great man, for only Mandarins can wear them. Should he fall out of favor with the emperor, his feather is taken away, and he feels publicly disgraced. You see the little boy has to kneel down when he speaks to this important man.

It seems such a long, long time since we heard from you because the letters have not been coming regularly of late, but we know that God is taking care of you and will bring you safely to us in due time.

Your loving MOTHER

MY PRECIOUS BOY,

I dreamed about you last night and so have been thinking much about you today. I dreamed that I walked into a room where you and a number of boys were. You recognized me at once and started to my arms. I went horseback riding today. Do you think you would like to ride a pony if I can afford to buy one? You see we are looking forward to your coming. Tell Grandma to feed you on potatoes as they are cheap and I haven't got any money to send you just now. Give all of them my love.

Lovingly,

PAPA

In October, Alice wrote to her sister Celia.

DEAREST CE,

I know that I shall be interrupted many times because there are so many things to see about, but perhaps you will forgive a scrappy letter under the circumstances. I am about over the morning sickness now.

On Wednesday last, David packed his few necessities and went on his bicycle to Tai An with Mr. King. They plan a preaching tour. Mr. and Mrs. Blalock are living here now, as you know, but he is ailing most of the time and she cries and sighs about his condition continually. All this makes me miss dear David all the more, for he takes the responsibility off my shoulders and keeps people bright by his own cheerful manner.

I feel very sorry for Mrs. B., yet I believe she would help her husband more by being brave than by bemoaning the fact that he is so sick!

In September the cook decided he had to take his wife and children to his home. I've been so busy trying to prepare the meals, getting something that will agree with both Mr. and Mrs. Blalock, that I have been very thankful not to have to fight the nausea. This week we have a new servant. He worries me a good deal by not being clean, and I am continually waging war with him on that score, but he can really cook some dishes very well and doesn't need a great deal of showing. A Dr. Van Schloick has joined the Presbyterians in I Chow Fu, and will be available when I need him in January. I'm sure you and Mother will be relieved to learn that. Even before a doctor has learned the language, he is a real godsend to both foreigners and natives. He has agreed to come over to diagnose Mr. Blalock's case and I'll have a chance to meet him.

I can well imagine what having so many pupils must mean to you. Do you think you were wise in accepting so many? The old schoolroom must need letting out at the seams. Who is going to teach music now that Miss Featherston has left?

Perhaps you will be able to find one to take that and the long division, too. I'm sure the ladies are pleased that Mother agreed to be chairman of the W.C.T.U. She is more of an executive than any of her daughters, tell her.

Give my love to Father and Leonard. We enjoy your letters so much.

Lovingly,
Al

Alice tried to remember all she'd been taught as a probationer and patiently explained to Lan Da-sao her role in the coming birth rites. But Lan Da-sao had given birth several times in the crouched position she'd been taught and saw little need for the emphasis on cleanliness. She just stared at the piles of white diapers and snowy sheets that were to be used for the occasion. In the end, Papa's experience with his first family stood them all in good stead, although it left Alice somewhat breathless. Baby Celia flourished, unaware of the importance of her role—that of furnishing a focal point in a strangely conglomerate household. Papa struggled valiantly with safety pins and voluminous petticoats and usually managed to effect some sort of packaging.

"Sometimes I think we should chuck the foreign clothes for the baby, too, and let her go open-hatch like the Chinese," he muttered. Alice giggled.

Before the onslaught of summer, like a gift from the blue came passage money for a trip to Australia. Friends in Australia wanted to see Alice and her family enough to muster up the fare.

"We can't stay long," Papa decreed, "but of course we'll go." Thought of travel always made Papa expansive.

"Little did I dream when a barefoot boy riding old Maud that I'd be seeing kangaroos under the Southern Cross."

Alice was seasick during most of the voyage, but Papa took to the waves like a true herring, enjoying to the full the fare and fellowship with travelers and the new experience of crossing the equator and seeing the coral reefs of the South Pacific. Caring for Celia posed no new problem to him and provided a welcome relief from the responsibilities that had bothered him ever since his assumption of leadership in the Gospel Mission.

"David!" Alice groaned. "You can't do that!"

"Who says?" He'd tied the day's quota of soiled diapers to a strong cord and lowered them through the porthole to the flowing seas below. "In the dark, who's to see them anyway?"

The ship docked earlier than scheduled. Papa hustled his family through quarantine and waved for a cab.

"I think we should wait," Alice said. "How do we know Father hasn't started to meet us?"

"But I *like* to give surprises!" Papa said, as if that settled the matter for all concerned.

Through the windows of the cab, he peered curiously at the tangle of streets leading off the Circular Quay, one arm holding Celia balanced casually on his knee.

"This is George Street," Alice said, arranging her long skirts about her shoes. "Look, there's the Royal Hotel. Just about everything of importance used to happen there!"

"Oh, I wouldn't sigh that!" the cabby interposed. "Beggin' your pardon, mum, but lots of important events had nothing whatever to do with them toffs from England. You tyke the convicts, now—those poor devils kept things lively-like, all down about the Quay!"

Alice laughed. "But Sydney's quite a respectable city, now. Look, the flowers are even prettier than I remembered!"

Papa was impressed. He eyed Alice thoughtfully, puzzled by the haunting wistfulness in her eyes. She was something of a perfectionist. How brash he'd been to think that giving her the role of missionary-wife-mother would satisfy her! In a way she was too finely strung for any mere man, certainly for one as crass as he. And yet, by George, weren't the Chinese right in all that business about the *yang* and *yin* of life—the male and female, the positives and negatives of the universe? He drew himself taller in the rocking vehicle and a twinkle played about his eyes. Whatever Sydney might mean to her, it should be an experience to separate the boy from the man within himself. He believed he was going to like Sydney. This place of her birth might be a sort of rival for Alice's deepest affections, and no mean rival, at that!

When the cabby drove off, after depositing passengers and baggage on the doorstep in Enmore—the suburb in which the Reas lived—Papa reached for the baby again. "It'll be nice when the British learn the merits of the decimal system," he drawled. "Shillings and pence, indeed! I probably paid that fellow double what the ride was worth!"

"It's not a bit harder than your decimal system," Alice said, but her voice had no edge to it. She moved a gloved finger over the names etched on the glass panels of the door. "Butleigh! That's what they called Mother's ancestral home in England, too, and here is Mother's name, Susan Ryall; and over there, Father's, Alexander Rea. See?"

The door swung open.

"Leonard!" Alice cried, and they were caught up in a happy confusion of welcome.

A buxom, grey-haired lady and a slightly larger version of Alice converged from upstairs.

"So this is my namesake?" Alice's sister said, managing to claim the baby in an inclusive embrace. "Come to your Auntie Ce!"

"There, there," Mrs. Rea crooned and held Alice at arm's length. "Let me look at ye a long moment. After all, you're still me baby." She lifted her face for Papa's kiss. "Alice tells me you're good to her and I can see it now, with me own eyes."

Mr. Rea emerged from his sanctum and peered over his half-moon spectacles. "Bless my soul! Why didn't someone call me?"

Alice threw herself into his arms. "Father!"

Papa could easily distinguish the cast of characters as Alice had delineated them. There was Leonard, the "difficult" son. Celia, just older than he, had apparently claimed first place in Alice's affections—after her mother, that is. Celia had seen the love of her life marry another and head for the mission fields of India. There was no indication that she was not now perfectly resigned to the role of "maiden aunt," not only to her real nieces, but also to the children of her former admirer. Mary, the eldest sister, lived in Melbourne but was waiting eagerly to bring her family back into the orbit of the old home as soon as it could be properly arranged. Papa was constantly amazed at the passion for propriety.

Along with the family, he met "Louie." Louie was the nursemaid and cook who'd clung through times good and bad to "Missus, dear," even when there'd been no wages during intermittent periods of Mr. Rea's unlucky financial ventures. Louie had already bossed and spoiled her first charges outrageously and immediately claimed the prerogative of spoiling baby Celia. Alice had no inclination to challenge her during the halcyon days of a short furlough.

Between Papa and Mrs. Rea there was an almost instant recognition of mutual aims in spite of surface differences. She'd never seen quite the chivalrous sort of humility that Papa showed, but she couldn't fail to recognize and appreciate the unselfish pattern.

"I'm certain one of them slept on the floor last night," Louie reported to "Missus, dear." "And I'm equally certain that it wasn't Alice."

"Well I should hope not!" Mrs. Rea said.

Later she cornered Papa, who was walking with the baby in the paddock. "Wasn't your bed comfortable, David?"

"Oh, yes, Ma'am!" Papa flushed as he realized she knew what he'd done. "Please don't mind that," he said. "I always sleep on the floor when my restlessness keeps Alice awake. You see, I'm different; I was never used to luxury."

Mr. Rea, on the other hand, was firmly ensconsed in his ivory tower and had little intention of descending for any appreciable length of time in order to set Papa at ease. If there was any adjusting to be done, it was clear to see who was to do it.

"He looks like Browning," Papa said to Alice. "And not nearly as formidable as you led me to believe."

"Just don't try any monkeyshines!" she warned.

"Is that a dare?" Papa countered, grinning.

The conversation took place in the high-ceilinged bedroom where the breeze from the ocean moved the curtains gently. Alice changed the baby absent-mindedly. She was like one who'd been starved and suddenly surrounded by plenty. Piano notes from downstairs cascaded through the first movement of Beethoven's "Appassionata." The feminine members of the family and Louie, doubly voluble in the present excitement, put finishing touches to the evening meal under Celia's capable direction.

At dinner the conversation flowed with ease. Mr. Rea peered at the baby's cherubic face smiling from Louie's retreating shoulder. "Is she musical?" he asked vaguely, and before there was time for an answer, "I want you to hear my new nocturne. I may have overemphasized the minor interlude. I'd like your opinion." Then, to Papa: "Perhaps you would like to hear my organ at the city hall, tomorrow?"

"Command performance!" Leonard muttered to Alice. He turned to Papa. "We grew up with that organ, David. In fact, it was like the camel in the fabled tent. More room for those plans and pipes than for us at Butleigh, *n'est-ce pas*, Alice?" Since his father preferred German, having studied in Germany for seven years, Leonard chose French phrases to sprinkle into his conversations.

"But Greek is one of my passions, too," Mr. Rea said.

"Alice tells me you read your Greek New Testament every day. What do you think was the intention of the word *echomen* in Romans 5:1? The short or long *o* would determine the mode and alter the significance a bit, wouldn't it?"

The short discussion engrossed them both.

"I see, now, who taught you to roast mutton, Alice." Papa smiled across the table at Mrs. Rea and reached to draw the platter closer for a second serving.

But the platter refused to move. Startled, Papa gave a second look, to find Mr. Rea's thumb and forefinger firmly holding the other side in place.

Alice choked on a drink of water and Celia smothered a giggle. "David's being initiated," Leonard said to Alice, *sotto voce*. "I hope he doesn't mind being made a fool of."

"David says no one else can do that nearly so well as he himself," Alice whispered in return.

Papa's eyes twinkled across to the older man's slow scrutiny.

"Do let me serve your plate, David!" And they both grinned widely.

"Rapport in minutes while I've struggled for years!" Leonard muttered. "Is that a Yankee trait, Alice?"

"Never call him a Yankee," Alice said. "That's not a nice word in his vocabulary. Remind me to give you certain obscure details of American history that made the 'War Between the States' anything but 'civil.' "

Papa's letter to his sister Ethel reflects much of his amazement over this phenomenal land Alice called home.

Alice's people are so good to us! I could not ask for a warmer reception. I expected her father to be so reserved as to be almost cold, but he has a kind heart. I manage to shock him a bit, though Alice said I should never venture to tease him.

I didn't fare too badly. Things are not going well with them financially because of the failure of a concern in which he had invested heavily. Like all musicians, he's not too practical.

What a lovely city this is! I have ridden my bicycle for miles and miles and never come to the end of it. By the way, I narrowly escaped injury the other day when I almost forgot to ride on the left instead of the right side of the street. In China we have no rules in that regard. What a funny world we live in.

I love to ride to the beach and lie down on a rock and look and rest. The climate is lovely. Though it is midwinter, there is no frost. The sunshine is like that of our sweet Octobers. They say it is unusually mild, but it never freezes. They have few killing frosts.

Tell George he should see the beautiful horses and the many droves of sheep as they are being herded to the stockyards. I took Alice's nieces to the zoo last week and wished he could have been with us. He would have been delighted with the platypus and the kaola bears and the kangaroos. I'm sending him a picture book of the birds and animals. Marjorie is just about George's age and equally as full of life. I told the children they laughed as much as the kookaburras. Really they are the funniest birds and you can't help laughing with them as they fill the trees with their mocking laughter.

The sojourn in Sydney was apparently the sort of interlude needed by both the Herrings after the bleak mission fields. It was good to hear church bells ringing on Sunday mornings, even if, to Papa's ear, there was something depressingly formal about the religious atmosphere. He'd accepted with alacrity an invitation to preach in one of the Baptist churches, but waiting in the rain for the tram after church that Sunday, Papa complained about the difficulty he'd had in "reaching" the small congregation of Baptists who had listened politely but coolly to their visiting clergyman.

"Perhaps they couldn't understand you."

"They understood my text, I'm sure. *Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold.* No, it goes deeper than that. I've found the same barriers at home where social patterns seem to outweigh the spiritual." Papa shifted Celia to his other arm and guided Alice across the wet cobblestones to the waiting trolley, scorning the umbrella for himself.

"Well, I'm sure Australians are every bit as missionary-minded as you Americans," Alice said tartly when they'd found seats on the jerking vehicle.

Papa laughed. "That just illustrates what I mean. We're all so—so abominably self-conscious about the whole thing and we should be more natural in this business than in any other. I'm afraid that living so close to the Chinese has spoiled me for any but the artless and unsophisticated."

Oddly enough those were almost the very words that Jim and Blanche Davis had used in talking to Alice about Papa. The Davises, brother and sister, were close friends of the Reas. No one made any attempt to hide Jim's erstwhile romantic interest in Alice. It was taken for granted that since he couldn't marry her, he'd never marry anyone. That didn't mean, however, that he'd forego a brotherly concern for all of her interests, including her marriage.

Blanche—until asthma had forced her retirement—had been one of the most promising pupils of the celebrated Melba. She it was who had given Alice her voice training.

"Strange that a college education in the States should differ so much from one here," Blanche said. "I don't see how one so artless—so single-minded, really—could give you the companionship you'd want."

"What do you mean?" Alice countered.

"Well, he seems a bit crude by our standards. Have they no symphonies or operas there?"

Jim cleared his throat. "Wait a minute, Blanche. We know nothing of the austerity that followed their Civil War. Americans always seem rather unsophisticated to us, but who are we to call them crude?"

A lesser man than Papa might have succumbed to pettiness, for he was aware of his limitations. But Papa preferred the light touch. "I can't understand how he'd let you slip through his fingers," Papa said of Jim. "Tell him if he's interested, I'll be glad to give him lessons in wooing, Southern style, USA."

When it came time to leave, a problem confronted Papa that seemed to grow daily in importance. At the studio of a prominent photographer were two mammoth photogravures of Alice's parents that must now be packed carefully for shipping. The photographer himself was much too involved in his art to include transportation of his fragile creations. Executed on opaque glass, and richly framed in gilt and velvet against olive-green wood, they waited unaware of the bleakness of their final destination in faraway Shantung.

"You'll have to get a dray," Alice said firmly. "It would break my heart to have either of those photos broken."

"Who says they'll get broken? I've carried more than that through Shanghai traffic on my bicycle with never *one* spill! A drayman wouldn't be half as careful as I'll be. Besides, do you know what a dray would cost?" Papa's voice always rose an octave when he was indignant.

"All right, all right," Alice soothed, aware that Louie would be hearing everything. "But if you *must* do the job yourself, why not ride the tram in safety!"

"Don't be silly!" The Victoria-slanted kangaroo court of social mores had been unmistakably benevolent, but Papa's patience was wearing thin.

Silly or not, Alice was nearly frantic before Papa arrived, the pictures still intact. As usual after such a challenge, Papa wore his "I-told-you-so" grin. "Just don't tell me any more that a thing *cahn't* be done," he said. "Makes me that much more determined to do it, you see."

"Do you know what?" Alice said tartly, "I think that's half the trouble with our Gospel Mission venture. You Baptists are so afraid someone's going to try to lord it over you."

"Oh, I don't know!" Papa drawled, and he winked at Auntie Ce. "I wouldn't say that. I wouldn't say that, at all. Take me, for instance." He set the pictures down carefully against the wall and bolstered them deliberately with a couple of hassocks so they wouldn't be jarred to the floor. "I haven't got a fear in the world on that score. Fact is, I sorter welcome anybody that wants to try!"

CHAPTER 11

Tung
Hsi
Nan
Pei

On the long voyage northward and across the equator again Papa enjoyed lively discussions with a Mr. Southwick, vice-president of a large oil company. Mr. Southwick had voyaged up and down the coast of China for a number of years and was plainly excited over the burgeoning business opportunities in the Orient, now that China—admitting defeat in the long-drawn-out Sino-Japanese War—had conceded Korea and the northeast ports to Japan, Dairen and Port Arthur to Russia, Tsingtao to Germany, and Hong Kong to Britain.

"This is the best thing that has happened to China since Chinese Gordon put down the Tai Ping Rebellion," Mr. Southwick said. Both men sprawled in deck chairs, their pith helmets propped against their noses to afford some protection from the glare that seemed to bombard them from all directions. "Commerce will do more for the East than missions any day! Meaning no offense, of course!"

He waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal, and Papa smiled. It was easy to see what this Australian did with annoying facts. He didn't even need a fly swat.

"Western nations are more enlightened, and while admittedly materialistic, do have motives of justice in the main, wouldn't you say? History—"

"History records what pleases the historians," Papa said. "I fail to see much justice in the Opium War, for instance."

"Granted. A blot on the 'scutcheon of my fatherland, and all that sort of thing." Again there was the airy wave of the hand. "But you take oil, now. There's a commodity you can believe in, no? Sell those poor devils oil and they'll crawl out of their walled cities and learn our way of living in a hurry!"

Papa removed his helmet and mopped his forehead. *Before long I'll be growing a queue again,* he thought. *Abandoning our "way of living," and for what? Where is the answer to the hodgepodge of human relationships?* He laughed shortly. "You speak of them as 'poor devils,' and they speak of us as 'foreign devils!' And the world expects the missionary to reconcile the two viewpoints—just like that! How are differences to be reconciled until there is self-respect on both sides of the Pacific? After all, self-respect is the commodity I'm dealing in, and admittedly it's slow business."

"You mean you're above feeling contempt for those—those blasted chinks? Don't you know they'd steal you blind?"

Papa's eyes flashed. "Do you think I don't know that, after ten years in China? Something I *don't* know is what

I'd be doing in their shoes. What I resent is this everlasting feeling of superiority, one country for the other. Oh, I guess you class me with all missionaries as hopelessly idealistic. But, believe me, there's a tremendous difference between sentimentalism and open-mindedness. And I'm for the latter. You can become so bogged down in sentiment that you can't tell black from white. Being open-minded is different. I'm frank to admit I wouldn't last long as a missionary, moved by sentiment alone. But I'm going to stick in there, fighting for every foothold, if necessary, just for the privilege of walking in the truth, as the apostle put it. See what I mean?"

Mr. Southwick turned to peer curiously at Papa. "You're a bit of a strange one! You make me feel vaguely uncomfortable, y'know."

Silence fell between them. A Japanese steward bustled up to serve tea. They swung their feet to the deck and sipped companionably. Mr. Southwick was the first to finish his drink.

"Tell me, do these reforms coming from Peking mean that the Empress Dowager is finally accepting foreigners as human beings? Can we count on peace in China for a while?"

"How should I know? This very Tai Ping Rebellion that you are glad to see suppressed was once a movement for liberty in China. *Tai ping* means 'great peace,' you know. The movement went the way of most of the world's schemes for peace. These outwardly righteous crusades become pretty unrighteous, as our War Between the States sadly demonstrated at just about the same time in history." Papa's gaze followed the dogged pursuit of two sea gulls, their wing thrusts seemingly tireless, hour after hour.

"But you asked about the Empress Dowager. What she'll do is anybody's guess. I think she fears England, Japan—in fact, all foreign nations. She knows that when they get into China proper, her hold over the people will fail. So far she's kept herself strong by virtual imprisonment of her nephew, the Emperor Kuang Hsu, and by exterminating all opposition that her spies can discover. But the Chinese have been humiliated by this treaty of Shimonoseki following the Sino-Japanese War. Just how much more humiliation they will stand is problematic. I wish China could realize what Christianity has meant to our countries, in spite of the lack of perfection that we exhibit."

"And you'd take your family back into dangers such as that?"

Papa nodded. "Danger is everywhere. I lost my first family in the comparative safety of the States." Papa stroked his moustache thoughtfully. "Besides, there's no place like home, even if it *is* in a walled Chinese city."

Mr. Southwick rose and stretched. "Well, I suppose it's every man to his taste and all that. But I don't even care to learn their confounded language, much less their antiquated philosophical rubbish about inaction being better than action. Look where it's gotten them through the centuries. If you ask me, I think it high time they did some orienting, themselves! It's time they learned how the other hemisphere lives."

Left alone, Papa pondered the significance of the word his companion had used. There was more than met the eye to this business of becoming *oriented.* The term itself was suggestive of an eastern, not a western, prospect. When Chinese speak of the points of the compass they begin, logically enough, with the direction of the sun's rising. *Tung, hsi, nan, pei*—east, west, south, north. It always amused Papa that Westerners thought the Chinese had the terms out of order. What the fellow really meant was that he was in favor of "occidenting," a process that had, so far, failed to bring any kind of Utopia to Western civilizations.

Actually, there is a wealth of imagery in the four words of the language the man had scorned. Broken into pairs, the implications are even more interesting. An east-west is a "thing," clodlike, inanimate—sometimes, when applied to humans, the term is a handy curseword. On the other hand, there is all the animation of heaven and hell where other characters are used in conjunction with the words *nan* and *pei.* He who is *nan-cheng pei-chan* (lit., south-wrangling, north-skirmishing) is one who constantly quarrels with his neighbors. To *nan-pen pei-pao* is to hurry south, run north. A ruler who sets about furiously slaying his enemies right and left is *nan-sha pei-chan.* And he who schemes in the south and begs in the north is "broke" by reason of his own chicanery.

As Papa's old Shantung teacher had explained the matter, inclusion of the words *nan* and *pei* always meant a recognition of an impelling force, a conviction (whether in assent or dissent) that some kind of lodestar involved all of human activity. *Man cannot escape polarity.* With such a concept Papa found himself in complete accord. The symbolism of this ancient language better expressed his own philosophy than anything outside the Bible. It is folly to ignore the claims of the Creator.

The return to the little home in Chining Chow found the Herrings grateful at least for the cessation of movement. The servants—somewhat rusty in their lessons on cleanliness—resumed their duties in the household and made the little family wonderfully welcome. In a moment of candor, Alice admitted that it was good to be back on terra firma again. It was as if the daily quota of frustrations had somehow—by reason of their very familiarity, perhaps—become less onerous, or else she'd grown stronger for the load.

But before Christmas, Alice found herself recurrently ill with sprue, a mysterious disorder that plagued many Westerners in the Orient. The disease kept her from absorbing much of the food she ate and sapped her energies. None of the various remedies to which she'd been introduced during her year of training as a nurse in Sydney furnished much relief. And there were the added discomforts of pregnancy that most wives expected at least biennially.

"I'm uneasy about her," Papa told Dr. Lyon on one of his trips to Tengchow. "How about moving Mrs. Lyon and your language study into our home until June?"

"My board may not think much of the idea, but their objections can't get here for three months, anyway. Mrs. Lyon would like nothing better than to learn the ropes of this strange country from Mrs. Herring." Dr. Lyon laughed. "We're pretty staunch Presbyterians, so I doubt if you Baptists can corrupt us much. It's funny how those differences shrink over here, isn't it?"

Papa nodded, but his eyes were sober. "You know I lost my first wife—"

Dr. Lyon cleared his throat. "Yes, I heard. That was in America, too, where women aren't quite so expendable."

"Believe me," Papa said and leaned forward in his chair, "Alice isn't expendable. Already she's the most important member of the team. The women's work—"

"Oh, you don't have to convince me. And I'll see to it that I get a fair exchange for my services—by getting your help in this confounded language."

Thus it was that Dr. and Mrs. Lyon moved into the compound for the duration of the emergency.

"Feed the baby Borden's Eagle Brand milk," he ordered after Gordon's birth in June. "Nobody seems to know what causes this sprue, and he may have contracted it too."

But securing Eagle Brand milk was easier said than done. It had to be ordered from Shanghai, where consignments were often treated lightly and sometimes disregarded altogether because of the hazards of traffic on the Grand Canal.

The Lyons left in August. The Blalocks were away on furlough, and that meant that Papa felt the need to play host to any itinerant missionaries who wandered into the area. Such were the responsibilities of the life he'd chosen. No one reared in hospitable Dixie could have knowingly left a fellow exile to the tender mercies of the lice-ridden inns.

"That order from Shanghai should be here any day now," he said to Alice once when they were out of hearing of a guest gifted with, among other things, a hearty appetite.

Alice carefully closed down the sticky lid of the half-empty can of milk. "It's our last one," she said bleakly. "Couldn't we just tell him it's all we have for the baby? He could drink tea without milk, couldn't he?"

"*Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days*," Papa quoted. "Besides, there may be other food that will agree with Gordon better. He certainly doesn't seem to be thriving as Celia did."

"Yes," Alice laughed shakily, "but I've always wondered if bread cast on the waters would be in any condition to eat after many days." Immediately she was conscience-smitten. "Oh, David, I just don't have the faith, I guess."

She turned the whimpering baby over on the *k'ang* and patted his tiny rump. His protests took on a rhythmic quality. Her glance swept the dismal confusion of their compressed living. Papa's long *kwa-tze* hung dispiritedly from a nail in the door. At its base was a handy box of the tools he used to repair the bicycles. It bothered her that the rooms had to be so junky. But tools had a way of evaporating when left out of sight.

Wang was gathering the dishes from the table. Even before the servant had finished his duties, Papa shoved the table nearer the door for better light and spread out his writing materials. The brief winter days sharply curtailed his working time. Oil, brought up from the ports in five-gallon tins, was so expensive that it had to be used as sparingly as possible.

Alice pulled a wool rug about her knees. Even with the fur-lined native shoes that Papa'd had made for her, she suffered from icy feet with the first coming of frost. There was simply no defense against the cold draughts on the damp earth floors.

Papa was not one to ignore the needs of his family, once he was convinced of their validity. He began a frantic search for a cow.

"The natives work their cows," Crocker reminded him. "They'll think you are crazy, you know."

"They'll not be the first to think so," Papa retorted.

He finally located a heifer with her first calf and effected a bargain with the owner, a farmer living in a neighboring village. After a period of haggling, the long strings of cash were duly counted and transferred. The old farmer rapidly marked off the cash with a long thumbnail into groups of five and smiled in satisfaction as the chain lengthened.

Papa leaned over to examine the cow's udders, holding the calf at a frisky distance. The expression on the Chinese' face changed to one of horror.

"Would drain her milk and keep calf from its mother?" he asked. "That would be murder!"

"Milking a cow doesn't hurt her, and I'll feed the calf better than he's fed now," Papa said. "See, here are pictures of the cattle we raise in countries outside your honorable Middle Kingdom."

But the bargain was called off indignantly. "No such evil can you pay me do!" He flung the cash in the dust. "No such evil can you pay me do for two times the money!" The bystanders roared at Papa's discomfiture.

On his next attempt, Papa was more circumspect and successful—though the milk supply proved scarcely adequate, even then. He fed the new calf quantities of boiled millet and pointed out to the servants that both cow and calf were thriving as few cows thrived thereabout. Word seeped out of the compound by way of the servants that the foreign devils were not as cruel as was thought.

Lan Da-sao, the old amah, was fatuous about Gordon. She carried him about in the sling on her back as constantly as Alice would allow, which meant she had to totter incessantly from one tiny foot to the other in order to keep her balance. Celia was a girl-child and merited no favors.

"*Ai yah, ai yah,*" Celia teased. "This is the way you wobble under the clothes line. See how your heels dig tiny holes in the mud?"

Lan Da-sao pushed her playfully over into the dirt. Alice spoke sternly in English from the doorway.

"Mind your manners, Celia!"

But the children's manners didn't bother their amah. Gordon pointed toward the cow just beyond the entrance to the rear court. She lay and chewed her cud placidly. "How" he said, gazing into her great yearning orbs. He couldn't manage the initial hard *c*.

"*Niu,*" the old nurse offered in return, secretly delighted at the linguistic exchange. Later she gloated to her friends. "The word for *niu* is 'how,' " she said, and the tone she used made it the Chinese equivalent of "good." She was learning much about these peculiar people. One fact was that their high-ridged noses carried an incredible sense of smell. She couldn't give Gordon even the tiniest taste of food without Teacher-mother complaining about the garlic odor. As if that would hurt a baby! Babies were supposed to smell. Then the devils would leave them alone.

No matter how busy the days, Alice always managed the bedtime rites which she felt were of prime importance in the rearing of children. She had no intention of allowing her babies to substitute Chinese for their mother tongue—as some missionaries did—no matter how much easier it was for children to master. At her direction, Wang built a roaring fire in the *k'ang* and brought in two buckets of water. Lan Da-sao bustled about, invariably laying out the wrong garments and clucking over the danger of exposing the tender babe to the air, even in small successive areas. These foreigners were incredibly hard-headed.

Celia bounced about noisily on the other *k'ang*. "Since Papa's not here, you'll have to tell me about '*ban-tung wa'rh.*' "

Lan Da-sao glanced at her mistress, but Alice was engrossed in putting on Gordon some of the many layers of woollies that Auntie Ce had knitted for him. Lan Da-sao knew better than to compete in entertaining the children. Teacher-mother wouldn't understand much of her nonsense anyway, since she knew little *tu-wha* (lit., earth-talk, or colloquial speech). But talking to children was a different matter. With her back to her mistress, she swung Celia's hands to and fro and chanted softly.

Ban-tung wa'rh, wei, wei.
Wo sze Nai-Nai-ti kwei, kwei.
Nai-Nai chao wo ta ki-tzao;
Ki-tzao pung, wo ye pung.
Nai-Nai swuh wo pu tzung yung!

I sit on a bench, rocking back and forth.
I'm my grandmother's pet.
Grandmother tells me to catch fleas;
When the fleas jump, I jump too.
Grandmother says I'm no good at all!

Nestled on his mother's lap, Gordon pulled a wet finger from his mouth and pointed at the brightly colored animals in a book that would have had much more meaning for an Australian child. Only the cow awakened real response. The sheep lacked the fat tails of the local flocks. The kangaroos were somehow better suited to outer space than to the confines of a Chinese compound. But it was quite evident that he enjoyed the ditty about the lamb with scholarly inclinations.

Alice snuggled him closer. "Mother's little lamb," she crooned.

He jerked erect and shook his head. "No," he insisted vigorously. "*How*, Mummy's little *how*."

Meantime Papa was growing anxious to bring George into the orbit of their life as a family. All summer, letters had been exchanged with tentative suggestions and plans. But the leaves of the *whei su* tree that shaded the courtyard well were turning brown before plans matured fully. Mr. and Mrs. Blalock would bring him with them on their return from furlough.

"I'm having a new bike sent out on the same boat," Papa said, jubilant over the long-delayed merging of his family. "That should keep him from missing his playmates too much."

Nothing could have kept Papa from making the long trek down to Shanghai to meet his eight-year-old son personally. If an excuse had been required, there was always a long list of necessities to be brought back to the other foreigners stranded without ink, safety pins, toothbrushes, and the other impedimenta of Western civilization.

In the familiar bustle of Shanghai again, Papa haunted the wharfs for news of the expected docking of the S.S. *Empress of Japan.* A typhoon in the Yellow Sea had delayed the boat, and no one knew at what time she could be expected. At midnight, the tender was closed and the dock hands dismissed. "Better get sleep. Ship be here mebby two, mebby three day," a stevedore told him. "Velly cold. Go topside hotel, mebby?"

But Papa had no intention of forsaking his vigil. He hustled about the dimly-lit streets until he found the owner of a junk docked nearby and arranged for transportation when the ship should arrive. In the meantime, he strode up and down the wharf, huddled against the bitter November wind. Finally lights showed far out in the channel, and Papa roused the boatman. The junk edged clumsily into the darkness where the murky waters of the Yangtze merged with the ocean.

The captain of the liner eyed Papa in amazement when he explained the reason for his eagerness.

"Mr. and Mrs. Blalock and your son are in cabin 17. We've had a rough voyage. Don't wake them yet."

Papa found a spot off the main lobby where he could wait for day. He took off his shoes and used one to prop the door open for fresh air. A steward bustled by, saw the shoe, and kicked it into a corner, softly closing the door. Papa waited until all was quiet and propped the door open again. He then managed to snatch a short nap.

"He's not my Papa!" George muttered sleepily when Mr. Blalock shook him to awareness. Then, with a wild whoop of joy, he catapulted into Papa's arms.

Papa delayed the trip northward to Shantung until George had mastered the art of keeping his bicycle erect a reasonable portion of the time.

"Sure, I can ride it, Papa. I won't get tired."

Papa grinned. Every day of the return journey they rode short distances on the tow paths bordering the canal, while the boat lumbered in their wake, either being towed by a line from the mast or sailing slowly with a fair wind. Not only was he preparing George for the physical challenge that lay ahead, but for the emotional one as well. "Don't you dare look toward the water, George! Mother fell into the canal the other day, doing just that!"

"Will I have to go to school, Papa?"

"Mother's going to teach you everything but your arithmetic. That's my field." Cueing George in on what to call Alice, Papa somehow made the word "Mother" a title ranking with that of any British noblewoman.

George grimaced. "I don't like school," he said. "But Aunt Bettie said you didn't either when you were my age."

"Aunt Bettie shouldn't tell tales out of school!" Papa grinned. "Do you think you could ride all day tomorrow

and let the boat come on later with our belongings? Thirty miles is a good long jaunt for a tenderfoot."

George's blue eyes glowed. "That would be fun. I could tell Wade Corbett about that, couldn't I?"

But the ordeal proved more strenuous than Papa had foreseen, even with frequent halts at the food shops. Once they huddled with other wayfarers over a charcoal brazier before an inn and Papa insisted that George take a brief nap, his head on his father's knee. It was nine o'clock that night before they wheeled wearily into the courtyard.

George's eyes swept around the dim recesses of the compound. He could not remember a former home in China or recall the image of his dead mother who'd walked as a phantom through the stilted conversations of his grandparents. Actually, the faint impression of familiarity about Papa was being rapidly merged into the flesh-and-blood revelation he'd been traveling with. And here, looming before him, was a stepmother he had never seen. The guttering candles behind her outlined Mother's figure, arms outstretched, but failed to illumine her welcoming smile. It was a moment fraught with peril to the dignity of an eight-year-old. And it was characteristic of Papa that he sensed, in the child, the deeper, more fundamental needs of a budding man.

"Know how far we rode today?" he asked, embracing Mother and smiling over her shoulder at George.

George advanced timidly. Out of the familiar dictums of Grandma's remembered patter, he mustered his next response. Grandma had told him to remember to shake hands.

Now it was up to Mother. She, too, was knowing her moment of panic. How could she avoid the stigma of being a stepmother? There were no guidebooks in psychology in those days. You had to play it all by ear. She knelt and pulled him into her arms, her eyes looking in relief at Papa above the tousled head. All her unspoken questions were suddenly answered: a stepson so close a replica of his father couldn't possibly pose much of a problem.

Lying beside Papa later that night, she pondered her new responsibilities. Most of what she'd been taught concerned merely the externals of life. Papa's artless approach to everyday living proved that only the mainsprings were important. He had never walled himself away from her in a masculine world she was forbidden to enter. But would George? She smiled, remembering the hair surging vigorously from the forehead and the sensitive quirk of the lips, so like his father's.

One thing she must work for: to keep open the means of communication. Life with Papa had a certain transparency—a quality missing in her own home, with its heavy emphasis on culture. She could always tell him anything that bothered her, because he never pretended to be "Sir Oracle." Even when he lost his temper and stormed at the servants, they neither scorned nor feared him but accepted the outburst as something normal, like a summer tempest. There were no murky silences. What quality was it that bridged the gap in human relationships? Humility? Childlikeness? She yawned and turned over to settle into sleep. Whatever it was, there was little to fear.

The integration of the family was not accomplished without its amusing moments, however. For one thing, North Carolina English bore little resemblance to the language Mother had known.

"Look, George," she explained, patiently writing verbs on his slate and underlining the *g*'s. "Running, seeing, smiling. See what I mean? Not runnin', seein', and smilin'."

George tore his eyes reluctantly from the antics of his favorite lizard, which slept under the west wall. He caught on quickly. Sure, he'd remember his endings.

Some days later, Mother overheard him talking to Celia, who shadowed him adoringly. "Shucks!" he scoffed. "These chickings look like our biddies in North Carolina." And later, to Papa: "Is Tai Shan Mounting as pretty as our Blue Ridge?"

Papa and George always presented a united front when they thought Mother needed teasing. Her curiosity about the ways of her in-laws and her newly adopted countrymen was an open invitation to being spoofed. What kind of people were they? How did they live in that casual land o' cotton, unforgotten? George was artlessly revealing a lot more than he knew, and her interest was piqued.

"You mean the stone cut right through Mrs. Corbett's shoes?" Mother gasped.

"No, ma'm," George said solemnly. "She don't—she doesn't wear shoes."

"You mean grown women in your neighborhood go barefooted?"

"Oh, not to church," Papa interposed quickly and winked at George.

The presence of children in the home not only made life more interesting for the missionaries but drew the natives closer to them and their work than the most skillful propaganda could have done. Each year at the dragon festival the children watched from the gate as the procession moved slowly down the narrow street. The clamor of the crowd, the screech of the fife, and clang of gongs announced the coming of the paper dragon. Excitement mounted as the head appeared, its long red tongue flicking this way and that. The twisting, bamboo-framed body was upheld at six-foot intervals by a score of men, only partially concealed by the flowing paper scales. They lurched drunkenly, making the creature appear to writhe through the crowd, while the smoking candles within cast an eerie glow. Children invariably fell back in awe before this supposed fire-breather.

The candy-blower stopped in front of Papa and the children, eyeing the white-skinned youngsters curiously. The crowd swarmed thickly, making open comments they never dreamed could be understood. They gaped at Papa's English replies to George's questions.

Papa held up three fingers. "Make three," he said in Chinese.

The candy-blower dipped his pipe into the thick red syrup and blew carefully. No one could guess what he was going to fashion from his first basic bubble, but he knew. He held the pipe lightly and at just the right angle while he breathed life, now into prancing hooves, now into the arching neck of some animal. Often he'd stop and lower the mass close, but not too close, to the boiling syrup and out would bloom something new. What could it be? At last there was a gasp of recognition. Held proudly for all to see was a tiny mule litter, complete with passenger and fan, a marvel of grace.

"*Ai ya!*" the crowd sighed enviously.

"Make something for them all," Papa told the candy-blower. "All who are no taller than this," he said, holding his hand low enough to exclude the older, greedier boys.

George bought a *kiao-liang* (sorghum-stalk) cage, porticoed and elaborately ornamented. Inside, a cricket moped, unimpressed by the grandeur of his prison.

"Will the cricket sing?" George asked Celia. He was beginning to understand the language but was shy about using it.

"Sure, very fine singer," the crowd chorused the answer. It was as if they'd grown up with the cricket and were anxious to introduce him as a friend.

Meanwhile, at the services in the little chapel, there were earnest prayers for rain. "If only it would rain!" Lan Da-sao muttered to the woman seated on the narrow bench beside her. "Now they blame the drought on the foreigners."

"You care for their children, don't you? Where is their baby? Why don't you have him with you?"

Lan Da-sao nodded toward Mother, who was seated behind the baby organ, facing the women's side of the congregation. A long blue curtain hid the women from the men. Otherwise few women would have ventured into the area. "She won't let me take him up after she puts him to bed. Doesn't she know a baby needs company to learn how to talk and eat? *Ai ya,* my arms are so empty!"

Her neighbor lifted her own toddler to her lap and bared her breast. The child subsided cheerfully, his placid round face only moments away from sleep. "Can their god bring the rain more than our kitchen gods? And is it true that you don't have to buy any incense?"

Lan Da-sao shrugged. "*Sai tze-dao?* Who knows? Sometimes it seems that all the gods are deaf."

"How do they treat you, these barbarians?"

Lan Da-sao smiled at the soft black orbs under drooping lids, and she stroked the small red-tiger shoes. "Their ways are queer, it's true. I do not understand them. But this I know: they will do no harm. They will do no harm to any of us. I wish old Buddha would leave them alone. I wish they would live here forever."

Mother smiled faintly as her eyes swept across the motley group before her. Two old crones exchanged gossip near the door. Apparently both were deaf and their voices carried shrilly. At least they were seated. A year ago they'd have darted in and out again, curious as birds, and as afraid of things strange. Mother put her finger to her lips and nodded significantly toward the other side of the curtain. Curiosity, more than reverence, stilled the group momentarily.

From behind the barrier a man's voice rose in prayer. Mother recognized the voice as belonging to the weaver who'd been baptized some two months previously. Some of his words she didn't understand, but she smiled at the imagery they evoked.

"Once unworthy servant used to try to bargain with you. How stupid he was! Please forgive. Ten thousand strings of cash could not buy the peace you have given me. Now all I want to know, O Ancient of the Heavens, tell your friend, what is your pleasure? What is it you would have me do?"

CHAPTER 12

Boxer Interlude

On the larger, adult horizon, the menacing quality of China's problems was beginning to permeate the daily life of even the most self-effacing missionary with an urgency that couldn't be ignored. Away from the area where his bicycle was a familiar sight, Papa found people whispering *"yang kwei-tze"* (foreign devil) in tones of real fear. Often a mother would whirl a child about or cover his face with her hands to shield his eyes from the supposedly baleful effect of Papa's. Emanating from Peking was a steady stream of propaganda that fanned the ready superstitions of the people.

Wang relayed the news daily from the market place, and fear clamored at the gates. "These 'Righteous Harmony Bands,' not even foreign guns can kill!" he whispered in awe. "Peking travelers say they can endure seventy sword slashes and still keep fighting. What chance have mere humans against spirits?"

Westerners called these Righteous Harmony Bands "Boxers." Someone had mistranslated the word "band" as "fist," and so grew the term, Boxer. Here, again, was a signal misunderstanding—this time on a world-wide scale. But Papa knew that the growing menace of the movement was not caused by a mere matter of semantics.

Deeper and far more ominous was the misconception about what was a righteous cause. From the crucifixion on down through "holy" crusades and wars to end wars, the same cruel fixations had been at work through all of human history. The Chinese were not alone in being unable to distinguish between a spurious righteousness and one that was genuine.

The fear abroad in the provinces was as nothing compared with the desperation in Peking. The missionaries didn't know how much to believe of the rumors that swept the land. Some said that the Dowager had been poisoned. "No," others insisted, "it is her nephew who is marked for death." Apparently the young emperor, Kuang Hsu, must have decided it was time for action on his part. He instituted twenty-seven reforms in the span of a hundred days. These reforms included belated gestures of conciliation toward foreign trade in the ports; token relaxation of excessive taxation on the heavily burdened populace; and even limited permission for the construction of railroads northward from Hankow, by France, who'd been clamoring for the privilege. But all the way, his efforts were frustrated by his stubborn old aunt.

Early in 1900, Kuang Hsu decided to give her some of her own medicine and imprison her in the recesses of the Forbidden Palace. An ambitious young man named Yuan Shi Kai elected to inform the lady of the plot. For his acumen Yuan was rewarded by the Dowager and given the post of governor of Shantung, replacing Yu Hsien, who was a relative of the Dowager and shared her murderous hatred of the foreigner. Mr. Crocker was sure things would be peaceful again. "Don't forget, this province is the home of their Confucius. Peking will have a hard time stirring up trouble here. You wait and see. I think the excitement will all blow over in a few months."

Papa and Mr. Crocker were returning from the home of a convert some twenty li out of Chining Chow, where they'd found the small group of believers dwindling in the face of the unrest in the land. Even so close to home, there seemed a new coldness about their reception at the tea houses and along the market places en route.

Papa swung off his wheel and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Mr. Crocker followed suit, and they plodded along silently for a few moments. "Even with a family, we can't afford to entertain fear. Fear is the death of faith—"

Papa had small appetite for platitudes, even in the best of circumstances. "Fiddlesticks! Who's going to say when fears are the mark of a fool and when the mark of a saint?"

That night they heard of the massacre of fifty missionaries in neighboring Hsien Si province. And the following week the Reverend Sidney Brooks was murdered. Mr. Brooks had lived only forty miles away from Chining Chow. Yuan and the Shantung officials tried to disclaim responsibility by making a grand parade and greeting certain missionaries with great cordiality in front of the people, but rumor had it that the imperial officials were secretly negotiating with the Boxers from Peking.

Early one morning in May, Wang called Papa out into the courtyard. He held up a paper streamer with heavy slashing characters marching down its length menacingly.

"These are on all the gates of the city. Crocker's servants have fled. It's kill! kill! everywhere." He drew his hand across his throat. *"Sha! sha! sha!"* Tears ran unchecked down his cheeks. "Senior Teacher, you must go!"

There was no other decision possible. There'd be little advantage in teaming up with the other missionaries. Their best chance was to try to be inconspicuous. If only the canal weren't so dry they could slip out by boat, hiding under the matting cover by day. You just did the best you could under the circumstances.

Papa barked out instructions as Mother gathered the frantic minimum for life en route. "I can carry Celia and Gordon in my bicycle basket. George can manage this light bag on his. Wang's nephew will bring a wheelbarrow and the cow." His face sobered. "We've got to face the fact that we may be separated—from the cow, that is."

Mother nodded, wide-eyed. Getting separated even from the cow might mean the end of Gordon's precarious existence. Nothing had ever seemed to agree with him, even under the best of circumstances. They must try to make their exodus look like a casual trip to a neighboring village, lest they spread alarm. All their Chinese friends would now become vulnerable.

By eight o'clock the heat was becoming oppressive. By midmorning, Mother knew her sun pains would return. She fed Gordon and directed Lan Da-sao and George in the final disposition of what they had to leave. "The silver there, under the baby organ, George, and cover it with this wool blanket. That's one spot where it seldom leaks, even during a snow."

"There!" George said, topping everything with a small flag that he'd brought with him from America. "Maybe they'll respect Old Glory!"

Papa loaded his pistol—a small .32—and tried it out in various positions in the girdle under his *kwa-tze*. Mother's eyes followed his movements, but neither of them spoke. Papa wasn't satisfied. Finally he jerked out the weapon, unloaded the cartridges, and stowed them handily in the little satchel with the baby food.

Lan Da-sao faced Mother tearfully. She clutched Gordon tightly in her arms. "Let me keep him," she pleaded. "His eyes are dark like ours, and I'll dress him as my own. No one need ever know—"

Mother's shoulders shook. Papa drew her into the circle of his arms and motioned the little group to attention. His simple Chinese words of prayer were the first whisper of hope in a raging storm. In the quiet of the courtyard, the farewells were said, and the little group emerged from behind the spirit wall as for a short trip to the country. Papa, with Celia and Gordon in the basket in front of his bicycle, led the way, while George brought up the rear.

The long hot day wore on. "If we can make it to Liao Chung and get a boat," Papa said, "it should be easier then." They had stopped twice, once under scrubby evergreens marking graves of a long-gone era, and again at a village food shop. None of the villagers had shown anything but the most natural kind of curiosity, and Papa responded by letting them see how the pedals worked the back wheel of his bicycle. A young fellow watched George spring on and off his wheel and begged for a chance to try it. The crowd roared at his futile attempts.

"I wish we could have *cold* water instead of this old hot tea," George complained.

"You should know why we can't do that," Papa said. "Remember how we all got typhoid fever in America? Nobody knew why, then, but the Chinese have known for centuries that hot tea was safer."

As night fell, they skirted the larger towns and sought out the quieter villages where the inns were cruder, if possible, but less conspicuous than those on the main highway. They came to welcome the dank odor of burning tea leaves that seemed to overpower the lesser smells of the hostelry. And hour after hour the children maintained their stolid acceptance of the nomad life suddenly thrust upon them.

The third day, Mother's headache grew blinding. They had dismounted and taken refuge under the scant shadow of a tree guarding an old shrine, whose crumbling rocks attested its antiquity. The small idol seemed to leer at their predicament. Gordon sucked his fingers and made no effort to climb out of his basket. His eyes seemed enormous in the wizened face. Celia and George explored the miniature dwelling of the idol.

"If we'd clean that mess up, it would be nice for a doll house, eh, Celia?" George said.

Wang could be seen plodding far behind them, allowing the cow to stop and graze at intervals wherever grass had survived the blistering heat.

Papa found a hummock of grass large enough to rest on. He drew Mother's head to his lap and massaged her aching forehead awkwardly. "You *are* a brave trouper, you know," he said, and cleared his throat. "Tomorrow we should be near Liao Chung. The road's a bit wider here for a few li, and you can shut your eyes while I ride along beside you and guide your wheel."

Before nightfall, they wheeled wearily into a village and inquired as usual for the honorable innkeeper. But the honorable innkeeper was in a foul mood.

"No room," he insisted. "There's no room at all."

Gordon whimpered weakly.

"May I prepare gruel for the baby?" Papa asked, noting a high central flame burning in the great brick stove against the soot-stained wall. "The baby's been sick and he needs food."

There was no answering gleam of compassion.

"Well, there's no help for it," Papa decided. He counted out cash and laid it in piles on the table. "Here's what I've been paying the other innkeepers. I'll make my family comfortable somewhere back here," and he strode on through the anteroom. Mother eyed the surly innkeeper timidly as she followed Papa back to the vacant rooms opening off the rear courtyard.

"George, you heat some water, and I'll milk the cow. I'll tell Wang to push on ahead and try to get the officials at Liao Chung to send us some protection. You write the note, Alice."

"Pray God it'll not be too late," Mother breathed.

The room was a long dirt-floored enclosure with a couple of *k'angs* against the far wall. In its musty confines the fetid, animal smells of other, unwashed predecessors bore down upon them. The only fresh air came through the doorway. Papa stepped over the high threshold and set down the billy of milk. "She didn't give much tonight.

I guess she doesn't like this traveling any better than we do. Got the note ready?"

Mother nodded. Papa read it, moving toward the fading light, his eyes sober. "I don't see how you could make it more urgent. I don't like the looks of that bunch of fellows out there."

"Maybe we should move on."

Papa shook his head. "Into the night, *now?* It would be suicide. We can't let them know we're afraid."

He closed the massive twin doors and slid the retaining bar. "I guess we'd better eat what we have on hand." No need to articulate the perils of any other alternative.

Their meal consisted of a few sesame seed cakes and some pickled turnips, with oatmeal gruel and milk for Gordon. Mother shook her head at the turnips. "I'm hungry, but not *that* hungry," she said. "Ugh, these smells!"

George ate with gusto. The turnips had been his idea earlier in the day when nobody had foreseen the need of hoarding food. Gordon decided he wanted some too.

"They'll kill him," Mother said.

Gordon yelled in frustration.

"A temper tantrum is just what we need *least* with that hostile man outside," Mother said. She tried to distract the wailing, thrashing child.

"Hush!" Papa ordered sternly. "Do you want me to give you something to cry for?"

The storm continued. Even under the best of circumstances, Papa was never one to let his children call the tunes. He picked Gordon up and spanked him thoroughly. "I'll be glad when he gets some meat on those bones. It's like spanking a sparrow," he muttered in an aside to Mother.

She wiped the tear-flushed face. Gordon's protests continued in a slightly lower key. She nodded. "I know. That's why I cahn't—"

"But he *isn't* a sparrow, y' know. He's got lots more sense. And he's still not convinced." Papa sighed and did what he considered his duty again. This time, Gordon admitted the futility of his small rebellion and consoled himself with his fingers. Although sobs shook him from time to time, he leaned wearily against Papa's shoulder. Papa paced the room, whistling softly. The candlelight threw huge distortions of his moving figure against the mud block walls and into the dusty beams overhead. Mother smiled faintly as she recognized the tune, a few measures of which he repeatedly monotonously, and slightly off key. It was a favorite of missionary groups all over China.

Ho, my comrades! see the signal
  Waving in the sky!
Reinforcements now appearing,
  Victory is nigh!

The chorus was the part that really snagged Papa's imagination. There, apparently, he saw flags a-flutter on battlements suggestive of Confederate bravery. This was the part he whistled over and over, like a broken record timed to the soft tread of his cloth-shod feet in the dust.

"Hold the Fort, for I am coming,"
  Jesus signals still;
Wave the answer back to Heaven,
  "By Thy grace we will."

The function of the song as a lullaby was purely incidental. Gordon was limp in sleep, but Papa kept pacing back and forth, his eyes grim. He was mustering his inner resources. He'd lost a family once. He'd no notion of repeating that bit of history. Outside, the clamor was increasing steadily, but inside Mother moved about, setting things to rights. The children giggled over their game of marbles.

Papa crossed the room to lay Gordon down on the *k'ang*. He tossed his queue over his shoulder again. One voice rose shrilly over the noise outside.

"What's he saying?" Mother asked.

"They're probably wild for their opium," Papa said. No use admitting the bullet-like repetition of the deadly *sha! sha! sha!* if she'd not recognized it. He wasn't surprised that she hadn't understood the oaths. They weren't in the English-Chinese language primers.

Suddenly there was the sound of labored effort. "Watch out," Papa said, snatching Celia out of the way just before the door, lifted from its socket, crashed heavily to the floor. "Back," he whispered. "Keep back!"

He strode up on the fallen door and faced the rabble, his eye reaching for some crack in the armor of hatred encasing the suddenly quiet mob. "Well? What can I do for you, gentlemen?" You would have thought he always expected guests to walk in thus. The cardinal principle of all Chinese quarrels is to let the other fellow seem to be the aggressor. Papa had turned the tables on his opponents, and for a moment, just for a moment, they were nonplused.

"Let's see your wheels," one shouted.

"Why, sure," Papa said, lifting George's bicycle so they could all see it. "Look, this is the trick—my feet here send the pull through this chain so. And the wheels spin round and round. But you have to keep going, or you fall down!" He laughed gaily. *If only he could keep them amused.* When anyone falls down, the Chinese always laugh uproariously. They smiled thinly at the mental image of a spill.

Papa bowed to the ringleader, a pock-marked fellow with an underslung jaw and a high, nasal voice. "Be so good as to help me right this door," he said then, keeping his eyes and voice level so as not to spill the tiniest drop of fear. "My family is very tired."

Amazingly enough, those closest to him sprang to give him aid, and Papa bowed courteously before barring the door again.

But the ordeal was not over. Again, the ringleader's voice clamored, and again the door crashed to the hard earth. This time Papa sprang to the gap and his eyes blazed.

"If it's killing you want—" he said deliberately to the sudden hush before him, "if it's killing you want, I'll *do* it. This pistol has six bullets. *Ee, e'rh, san, sze, wu, liu,*" he counted slowly. "That means six of you will die before we do. Do you realize that?" Papa pinned the eyes of the ringleader mercilessly, unwaveringly. There was no doubt who would be number one.

No one moved or spoke.

How long can this go on? Mother wondered. She huddled the children against her knee. The candle flame wavered in the rush of air across the hostile mob. Much as she'd wanted fresh air during supper, its menace chilled her now and she shivered. The sullen shifting of feet and the overhead flare of torches gave her the feeling of being trapped under a cresting wave of ominous proportions. Chances for survival were now as feeble as the flickering light of their little candle.

From somewhere in the rear, a shrill voice carried across the crowd. "Time to smoke opium! What are you waiting for?"

"To be sure!" the ringleader muttered, his face saved just in the nick. "Honorable host is right. Who wants killing when it's opium time?" Sheepishly, they drifted off. One turned again and helped Papa hoist the heavy door. Even by the dim light, the narrow-lidded eyes showed a healthy respect for this tall, vigorous stranger.

Papa groped to the *k'ang* and gripped Mother's shaking hands. He was afraid to speak lest he betray the tremor that shook him, now that the crisis was over.

"David!" Mother gasped. "Did you know that the bullets weren't in the gun?"

"Bullets—?" Papa echoed stupidly. "You mean—?" His mouth fell open. From time to time, in the dim light, Papa shook his head. "Empty! I'd forgotten! It's a good thing I didn't know. I can't bluff."

CHAPTER 13

Standeth
God
Within
The
Shadow

The inn settled to its usual night noises. Steady snoring began in the room adjoining. An ass brayed intermittently through the night, and crickets sang cheerfully. The children slept. Papa turned over gingerly on the *k'ang* he and Mother shared.

"You asleep?" Mother asked finally.

"You know I'm not."

"I heard something outside."

"That scratching noise? It's only a dog. Try to get some rest. You'll need it."

Long before dawn they roused the children and wheeled quietly out of the premises. The front gate squealed wickedly, so Papa didn't risk closing it. But nobody challenged them. Out in the country again, they dismounted and let the children stretch their legs. George found a few stalks of wheat and showed Celia how to blow the chaff from the grains, brown, hard, and unpalatable because of the drought.

"Doesn't the air smell wonderful?" Mother said. "Look, the stars seem so close. Only, they aren't the stars I knew at home. You're very quiet. The fear still with you?"

"Uh-huh." Papa saw little need to deny it. "What was that poem of Lowell's that you were memorizing, George? That part about truth forever on the scaffold?"

George recited it glibly, savoring the trochaic lilt to the full, whether the words meant anything to him or not.

Yet that scaffold sways the future,
  And behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow
  Keeping watch above His own.

"That's it, George," Papa said proudly. "Don't ever forget it, son."

They walked on in silence for a while.

"I'm hungry," George said.

"Maybe we can find some sugar cane," Papa suggested.

The eastern sky brightened and crows cawed above them or settled in noisy confusion in the surrounding fields. A pack of hungry dogs charged at them from a village as they passed. Papa stamped his feet and stormed in Chinese until they realized he meant business and skulked back to the village.

"I'm hungry," George said again.

Papa stretched. "Then it's up to us to find food."

"Not anywhere near here," Mother pleaded. "I don't want to *see* another innkeeper."

When the sun rose they were still pushing ahead. They were rarely out of sight of a village now. Farmers, drift-ing out to their fields, eyed them curiously. Once Papa asked to buy a ploughman's lunch of steamed bread and fried onion tips. But he shook his head and wolfed his food stolidly.

"I'm hungry," George said again. "Bet you can get good *mien-tiao* in that village ahead."

"Bet you can, at that!" Papa said and headed his little caravan into the larger throughfare. A flock of sheep crowding the passageway ahead of them panicked at the sight of the bicycles. The road lay in a sort of gully. There was no way of escape for the frightened animals. Papa dismounted and beckoned the shepherd to come ahead. He looked almost as frightened as the small lamb he carried, but once he had passed the strange contraptions he had no trouble getting the herd to follow him. Gordon waved wet fingers down toward the bleating animals and grinned for the first time in days, even through the clouds of dust that enveloped them. Papa took it as a good omen.

"Once you get something to eat, your head should feel better," he assured Mother, but he knew from the pale set expression around her mouth that nothing could remedy her headache now. He knew what her migraines meant—she often suffered for days at a time.

But the *mien-tiao* at the food shop tasted wonderful, and they all ate heartily. Papa remembered the words of the philosopher Chu Po-Li, *With each meal remember the hardships from whence it came.* Was the clarity of gratitude that hovered like rain-washed atmosphere about them due to the close brush with death last night or to the uncertainty that freighted every moment, even now? He didn't know.

But before noon, Mother said she could take no more, and the little party holed up under a tree near an ancient grave. The children looked on in pity as she retched and lost the meal, moaning softly. Papa sent George across a field to a bamboo grove where smoke indicated a fire of some sort. He came back with the billy full of tea. Papa sponged her face awkwardly. Several children from the village had followed George to see what was going on.

"Don't kick dust on her; can't you see she's sick?" Papa said sharply.

"Don't be impatient, David. They don't know any better!"

"Well, it's time they learned," Papa muttered. He shooed them away. They moved back briefly and closed in again like flies, swarming.

Suddenly one of the boys pointed down the road, and the little group fled like frightened birds toward the village.

"Shucks, it's just another flock of sheep!" George said, shading his eyes against the sun.

But Papa knew that the cloud of dust traveled faster than any flock of sheep. Whether soldiers or Boxers, who could say? In either case there was nothing further he could do about their plight. They could only wait. It hardly seemed possible that Wang had secured help so quickly.

Soon he could count six horses. Coming abreast, the riders reined in sharply, and the horses, their flanks wet with sweat, heaved noisily. "Is your honorable name Hai, by chance?" one of the horsemen asked.

Papa bowed and clasped his hands in gratitude. "It is, most worthy ones. Can it be that you have come in response to my plea for help?"

They had. Papa helped Mother to mount one of the horses. "I guess I can handle him," she said. "I've always ridden sidesaddle, though."

"You can han'le him," Papa said. "Those *ku-tze* (trousers) are much better than the ridiculous riding habits of Australia." The lilt in his voice showed that he felt anything could be licked now, just anything at all.

Grinning broadly, two other soldiers hoisted Celia and Gordon to their saddles, while a third insisted he could ride a bicycle and would lead the caravan on Mother's wheel. Everybody laughed when he dashed out ahead, veered sharply left, right, then left again and wound up in the ditch.

The short trip by houseboat from Kiaoshung to Chefoo afforded the blessed relief of privacy and a chance for Mother to get over her migraine. As they disembarked, the children looked curiously at the gaily decked streets, the Western-style buildings, and the bright, feverish activity of the modern port.

"I wonder what they're celebrating," Papa said.

"Why, it's Her Majesty's birthday. I'd forgotten!" Mother blinked. "Only—"

"Only how do you suppose all this strikes the Empress Dowager? And we think the Chinese are obtuse!"

"At least Queen Victoria protects the stranger within her gates," Mother said tartly.

Papa loaded the family into rickshaws and pointed toward the harbor, where the rigging of foreign craft laced the sky. “The Chinese say there’s an American gunboat somewhere down there, George. You take Mother and the children and wait for me. I’ll be along, soon as I can make a sale of the cow and bicycles. We’re going to need some money.”

Crowds of missionaries and children dressed in bedraggled clothing, some Chinese, some outdatedly foreign, sat on their baggage or milled about awaiting transportation to Japan, the nearest haven of safety. Young British and American sailors, tired of months of inaction, suddenly found themselves needed to police the confusion. Each new arrival was immediately surrounded by questioners eager for news of friends left inland at the mercy of a people suddenly gone berserk. A Swedish girl sat holding a tiny baby and weeping openly. “My hoosband had neffer seen his son; yust lak hiss fodderr too,” she wailed. “He was coming next week already!” A German couple with four children had apparently taken her as their responsibility. “There, there,” the older woman crooned as to a fifth child.

Somewhere along the way, Papa had found the Crawfords, and the old couple embraced the children warmly. Dr. Crawford, with his long cane and flowing beard, looked even more like a patriarch than Mother had remembered. But there was plenty of fight left in his spare frame. Nobody had heard what was the fate of the Royalls, Mr. Crocker, and others. “If I had a rifle, I’d join the army and help clean up those Boxers,” the old man quavered, and everybody laughed.

Finally came the turn for the Baptists to board the tender and be taken across to the waiting American gunboat. Celia had weathered the rugged trip so far better than her elders, but in the crowded lifeboat that scudded over the waves her stomach staged a private rebellion of its own. It wouldn't have been quite so private, however, but for the quick thinking of one of the officers, who doffed his cap just in time for the emergency.

George laughed immoderately, and Mother blushed her thanks and apologies.

"Are all Americans so ingenious?" she asked. "No wonder Cornwallis surrendered!"

"Ye-es, Ma'am!" he drawled in accents unmistakably Southern. Then, to George, "She's talkin' Chinese or something?"

It was Mother's first intimation that anyone would consider her use of the English language unintelligible.

From the galley aboard ship a steady flow of hot waffles and syrup quieted the fretting children, and their elders were able to restore a semblance of order to their ranks. Their host, Uncle Sam, was at his avuncular best. Never were the Stars and Stripes more gallantly streaming than that day above the huddled refugees.

Where to go now? That was the question that faced everyone. There was little likelihood that things would settle down before fall. The Herring furlough was due, although Papa had intended to wait another year because of the Australian trip sandwiched in three summers previously. He finally secured second-class passage on a Japanese ship bound for Yokohama by way of Jinsen, Korea. In Yokohama he found refuge in a native home, hoping to secure a loan from some benevolent source for passage to the States. But before this could be accomplished, Gordon came down with a high fever.

"Measles!" said the doctor, depressing Gordon's tongue for a look in his throat. "Why do you take them into infections?" he barked.

"Watch out, you'll choke him!" Mother protested indignantly. She spluttered later to Papa. "Who does he think he is, ordering us about like that, anyway? Small wonder the Chinese resent the brusque ways of Westerners!"

Gordon's condition delayed their return to the States for a month. When at last they boarded the resplendent liner, *Empress of Japan,* George delightedly recognized it as the ship on which he'd come to China. But twice during the voyage they thought Gordon would never make it.

"Stay on the West Coast somewhere and build his strength up with fresh fruit and cheese," the ship's doctor ordered, glancing at the meagre possessions that littered the cabin. He started out, stopped short, and faced Papa. "I've seen a lot of you missionaries," he said, and Papa braced for the usual criticisms. "Some of you are hell-bent on changing people to fit your—your patterns." He cleared his throat and tamped tobacco into his pipe thoughtfully. "Others of you seem to have something—" he groped for words, "some commodity, perhaps, that most of us lack. I don't think I could have stood *this,*" and he gestured vaguely toward the cabin's confusion with his pipe. "I don't think I could have stood *this* for the sake of my fellow-man, for instance."

"But yours is a noble calling too, Doctor. And you—"

"I'm a selfish old ass!" He pulled out his wallet and pressed a wad of bills into Papa's hand. "Take it, man. I've had value received."

In Tacoma, rooms to rent were definitely for people without children, even those trained to British standards, which in Mother's opinion had something on the American. Papa managed to find a small gas-lit affair in which they cooked frugal meals and made excursions to a nearby cemetery to soak up fresh air and sunshine.

It was October before Papa herded his second little family up the long lane to the Pender County farmhouse. Sere stalks bristled in the fields where Negroes bent to cram handfuls of white cotton into trailing burlap sacks. The clear golden sunlight had dispelled the early hint of frost. George stood up in the surrey to wave eagerly to an old colored man who stared unbelievingly as they passed.

"There's Uncle Eph!" he said to Mother. Through cupped hands he called back to his friend. "I'm George, Uncle Eph!" Then he remembered something long forgotten. Turning excitedly to Papa, he said, "Uncle Eph told me he wanted you to preach at his church next after Wells's Chapel, Papa. You will, won't you?"

Papa watched Mother's expression. He'd tried to prepare her for life in a "homeland" that was anything but that for her. But how well had he succeeded? The stark simplicity of life here might prove even more difficult than that of old Shantung. Slavery was long gone, and there was little money to pay hired hands. Poverty was such a leveling thing. Was she really sold on the democratic way of life that was the Southerner's pride and joy?

Here, by contrast to China, there were no walls. Not even walls like those of Tacoma, or Shanghai, or Sydney, where crowding humans had set up social boundaries for living. She would accept, as all Victorians did, the idea that sharp racial distinctions were determined by the Creator, with whom nobody was disposed to quarrel. Perhaps she'd grown used to those other walls and would feel lost without them. He could tell nothing from the little smile that hovered over her lips, nor from the clear light of dedication in her brown eyes, narrowed against the bright sun.

The dear familiarity of the woodlands embraced him. His spirits began to soar. What did the clutter of civilization matter while the sweet gum and maples were flaunting their riches among the cypresses of Long Creek?

"Why, the old water oak's gone!" He turned to George.

"Yes, they cut that before I left," George said, and it was as if they spoke of a friend deceased.

"What smells so nice?" Celia sniffed the wood smoke and resin.

"We should have written what time to expect us," Mother said. "Won't it embarrass your mother to have so many to feed?"

Papa laughed. "Ma? Not Ma. And what if we'd been delayed further, to disappoint her again?"

"I can catch a couple of fryers for Gran'ma and it don't take long for her to rustle up biscuits."

"Doesn't, not don't, George," Mother corrected him.

"Let him be for a while, Alice. After all, he'll probably communicate better than either of us at first."

When the surrey wheeled into the yard, Ma, Bettie, and Ethel raced out to welcome them. Papa embraced his sisters and stood, arm about his mother, to introduce Alice. Bettie blew a resounding blast on the horn to call up Pa from the field.

"When we didn't hear from you for so long—" Ma said, stroking George's hair nervously. "Oh, it was terrible. O' course it wasn't so bad when we knew you were in this country and safe from them heathen." She smiled down at George. "My, how you've grown!" She hugged him again.

"Shucks, I told you I'd be back," George said, as if a simple promise was the only thing necessary. "Hi, Gran'pa," he shouted and scampered off to throw his arms about the old man plodding across the lot toward the group.

On the porch a frail stooped figure struggled to his feet, scattering quilting scraps about him. Papa introduced him proudly to Mother. "Uncle White was in a Yankee prison for fourteen months, Alice." Papa threw his arms about the old man. "How good it is to see you! Are you all right?"

"Tol'able," the old man quavered, and tears welled in the mild blue eyes. "I knowed you'd come back!"

CHAPTER 14

Southern Exposure

*I*n the privacy of the bedroom, Papa shucked out of his coat and stiff collar and rolled up his sleeves. Grandpa and George had claimed the children to show them about the yard. Mother held the coat and looked about the room for a closet or wardrobe, but there wasn't one. Papa reclaimed the garment and hung it on a ladder-back chair, obviously homemade. There was no apology in his action. Mother loosened her hair, which, for some reason, was curlier than it used to be in Shantung's arid climate. "How old is he?" she asked. "He looks too feeble to be cutting those squares!"

"Uncle White? Oh, about sixty, I'd judge."

"Doesn't he have children of his own to take care of him?"

"Sure, but Ma counts it a privilege to do for her brother." He laughed. "Besides, she sees to it that we all pull our own weight."

"I don't see how she can manage us all in a house of this size." She laid down the hairbrush and twisted her hair into a coil high on her head, squinting at the distorted image in the tiny mirror as she loosened the waves of her pompadour. "But, as you say, perhaps we Britishers put the emphasis on the wrong things."

"Oh, you have no monopoly on that! I've seen houses in Louisville, for instance, that were as big as all outdoors; but you scarcely had room to change your mind in them. Oh, no. People the world over make that mistake."

Mother, busy with her own inner adjustments, failed to notice the twinkle in his eyes. She nodded to her reflection in the mirror. "I can see why you are so proud of her!" she said finally.

Papa seized her roughly and whirled her about. He lifted her chin and forced the brown eyes to meet his now sober gaze. "Let's get this straight, early," he said. "Sure, I'm proud of Ma. I'd be a fool not to be. But I'm even prouder of the mother of my children, see?" He kissed her convincingly.

Her cheeks were still rosy when she joined the children in the yard. Grandpa introduced her to Queenie, who was lifting clothes from the boiling suds in a huge black caldron by the meat house.

"Queenie's real name is Queena Sheba," Grandpa explained, and her dark face glowed with appreciation. He drew some licorice from his overall pocket, broke it, and handed pieces to Celia and the twin pickaninnies, who eyed him gravely from behind their mother.

"How nice and white your laundry looks," Mother said, indicating the clothes draped on the rail fence.

"Yas'm" Queenie said, but you could tell she didn't understand this foreigner.

At dinner, Aunt Bettie poured buttermilk from a blue hobnailed glass pitcher into huge goblets set about on the clean cotton tablecloth. Grandma lifted biscuits from the stove and eyed George's hands. "Go wash your hands, son. And then set out the 'lasses jar. I know you're goin' to ask for it."

"Give that baby somethin' to eat, Alice," she urged later, after the meal had started. "It's easy to see he's starvin'."

"But he gets sick so easily," Mother said. "Nothing seems to agree with him." Gordon sat hunched over in her lap, his heavily fringed eyes like coals in the thin little face.

"Corbett's baby didn't begin to grow till they fed him sweet potatoes," Grandpa said. "Why'nt you try 'em?"

"Sweet potatoes?" Mother echoed weakly.

"We might as well try it," Papa said, suiting the action to the word.

No one ever knew whether it was the climate, the sweet potatoes, or the atmosphere of faith surrounding him, but something turned the trick and Gordon began to thrive as he'd never done before in his short life. Mother's health improved too, although she could never have been called a convert to the steady diet of pork which everybody took for granted. She was inclined to think the Lord had a great point in depriving the children of Israel of pork.

The first frigid days of December found the whole neighborhood up to their elbows in lard. Mother asked Papa in tones of shocked disbelief, "Do you *know* what chitterlings really are?"

Celia roamed the farm at George's heels and made playmates of the children in the neighborhood as she'd never been allowed to do in China because of fears concerning smallpox and cholera. The docile attitudes of the colored children delighted her, but she was baffled when Queenie's twins refused to come in and eat with her at the end of a morning at play.

The children, ill at ease over being in the front hall, balked completely at Celia's insistence that they come into the dining room. They rolled their eyes in fear lest Queenie discover their whereabouts and send them scuttling.

"A generation ago, in Africa, they'd have been killed just for bein' born twins," Grandma said later when the family had assembled around the table. "The Yanks should know that slavery wasn't *all* bad."

"It wuz *all* bad fer us," Uncle White said. "We fit 'n' we lost. We'd 'a' lost if we'd won. Thing I used to hang on to in prison wuz them words of Burns's, 'A man's a man for a' that.' Folks North *and* South has a way of forgettin' that."

"He's like your Grandpa, ain't he, Dave? He should've been a preacher, too," Grandma said.

Papa nodded, allowing the conversation to drift into shallower channels.

Later, as the men gathered before the fire with much noisy scraping of chairs, he broached the subject again. "Do you mean you wouldn't fight now, over the same things, Uncle White?"

Uncle White spat into the fire, and the tobacco juice sizzled in the ashes. The women folks were clearing the table and setting out food for Queenie and the children in the kitchen. "I reckon I'm no yellower now than I wuz then," he drawled, and everybody laughed. Hunched in his chair, he peered fondly at Papa. "It ain't the fightin'!

This ole world will always have need o' fighters. It's the *how* and the *why* of every little ole decision we make about that fightin'. Every woman's son among us. Ain't that so, Dave?"

Again Papa nodded. He knew the subject had veered to the Gospel Mission issue. And about that, he was worried. On this side of the ocean, the issue apparently wasn't nearly so red hot as it had been on his last furlough, but in China the needs had been doubled by the Boxer fiasco. He sensed the vacuum caused by the lack of leadership here. "Folks'll rally around when they hear the facts," he said, stroking his moustache soberly. "All we need is the human touch again. I find folks just as easy to talk to as before. Fellow in Wilmington, the other day, asked me did I think all this bigness was such a good thing in the Lord's work anyway. Plenty of Baptists think there's need and room for smaller organizations."

George brought in an armload of wood and dropped it against the hearth. He and Gordon sat cross-legged in front of their elders, spat into the flames, and giggled softly. They ducked their heads as Mother paused behind the little group, her hands full of dishes. But she was too intent on the conversation to notice the children's pastime, of which she'd have disapproved vigorously.

She stood a moment, listening. Albeit for different reasons, Mother looked askance, as Papa did, on religious bureaucracy. "All this bigness you deplore is prophesied right there in the Bible, you know! This growth isn't the natural kind that Paul was urging on the churches: there is the unnaturalness implied in the parable of the mustard seed—an herb transforming itself into a tree!

There's even much spiritual significance in the mention of birds roosting. When birds are mentioned in the Bible—with the exception of doves—the connotation is nearly always evil."

Uncle White looked over his shoulder in mild astonishment. "I ain't never heard it explained that-a-way," he said.

Papa's face showed pride in his wife's knowledge of Scripture. He didn't always go along with her exegesis, but he was all in favor of granting her liberty of opinion. The fact is, he'd found her fund of information as useful as a concordance, and twice as convenient. All he had to do when he was trying to locate a verse for a sermon was to open his study door and call to her, "Alice, where is that about 'cleanse your hands, ye sinners'?" And Mother would give the information along with suggested parallels. "Alice is quite a Bible student, Uncle White," he said proudly.

"I'm sure all this concentration of power is one day going to culminate in the rise of the Antichrist. You've read about the Antichrist, haven't you, Uncle White?"

"Yes, Ma'am." Uncle White never quite overcame his diffidence in Mother's presence. He liked her, but he found it hard to realize she was kinfolk, what with her strange ways of talking and all.

"Shucks, I wish you'd preach about gettin' away from the Boxers," George said. "That's lots more interesting than sermons, or how many Bibles you gave away, or how many people you baptized. Why, I guess I was scareder than I've ever been in my whole life!"

"And for the sake of playing hero, give false impressions of the real nature of the Chinese?" Papa shook his head. "Folks have wild enough ideas now, without my contributing to them."

Something about Papa's attitudes always attracted the ladies. They fluttered in the offing at every " 'sociation meetin' " and vied with each other to set before him and his family the very tastiest Southern dishes. Every Sunday during the short winter the visiting missionaries ate high off the hog, very literally.

One morning in early summer, after a tropical storm had ripped up the Carolina coast leaving streams high and roads riddled with holes, Papa was moving about in the early dawn in preparation for a two-hour journey to an important meeting. This convocation involved a large number of country churches whose decisions could materially affect the chances of the Gospel Mission venture.

"Must we get started so soon?" Mother asked wearily. She was having a bout with morning sickness. The rain still blew against the windows.

Papa peered down at her in the dim light. "Perhaps you shouldn't try to go at all," he said. He turned and paced the room. "Fact is, sometimes you can't always tell—"

"You need me, don't you?" Mother sighed. "Besides, I'm as much interested in this as you are, remember?"

"Why don't we leave the children here?"

Mother shook her head. No use to explain how fundamentally her ideas of child care differed from Ma's. Mother was never one to neglect her duty as she saw it. "George will be here," she said. "The little ones might tire your mother."

At breakfast, Celia spilled milk on her clean pinafore. Mother sponged off the ruffles and waited for the sadirons to heat on the range. Meanwhile, Gordon pulled the bucket off the washstand on the back porch, acquiring a swelling bruise on his forehead and necessitating a complete change of gear.

Rain was still falling when Papa clucked old Maud into a brisk walk, but bright eastern skies indicated that the curtains might not be necessary for the whole drive.

"How does my hat look?" Mother planted Gordon firmly in her lap and folded her long skirts discreetly out of reach of Celia's feet. "I didn't even have time to look in the mirror."

But Papa was already engrossed in his problems. "If that fellow from Raleigh takes the notion, he can put me out on a limb. They are so enamored of conformity! I have no designs on funds they gather, so why should they fear me? It's the churches that aren't enlisted at all that I'm anxious to challenge. Hocutt told me that his folks were as 'hard-shell' as they could be until you talked to the women that day. Now they want to go in with the Briar Creek Church to support a Bible woman. They wouldn't have been moved at all by a general appeal."

"It seems to me that the pastor is the key to the situation. How does Hocutt feel?"

"Well, he resents interference from outside, and he believes in democratic processes, so I think he'll lead his people into making their own decisions." Papa snapped the reins on Maud's back. "And that's all I'm after, really."

Throughout the long morning of hymn singing and speechmaking, the side issues stayed discreetly in the background in favor of the main one of missions in general, or at least Baptist missions. Only a person versed in reading between the lines could have caught the implications in fulsome praise given to one pastor and withheld from another.

"That milk of human kindness is almost thick enough to clabber," Papa whispered to Mother after one outburst of flattery directed conspicuously toward a brother whose influence had been "good" as interpreted by headquarters. But he was pleased and slightly disarmed to find he had been given the important hour just before dinner, which, of course, was to be served in the church grove. Papa's text was *Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.* Mother had heard the sermon often, but there was something always moving about a simple illustration he used of a mute old Chinese beggarwoman with an outstretched hand. Once he raised his voice when a chorus of amens swayed the kerosene lamps. But there was nothing phony about his delivery, either then or at any time—no pious tremolo or theatrics to be shed like a garment when he stepped over the threshold into ordinary life again.

She stole a glance behind her. Leaning forward in earnest concentration were unsophisticated farmers and their families, even the children momentarily stilled by the rare contact with a life beyond their horizon. "Of course! They love him!" she thought with a sudden burst of illumination. "He's no outsider anxious to mould them into some prearranged pattern and barely hiding condescension the while. *A stranger will they not follow.* How apt was the metaphor of John 10! Apt, and eternal in its significance, because people the world over are such followers, so vulnerable!" Her mind raced through the familiar words with their hint of plunderers among the flock. "And the leaders fear him because they don't know his motives." Her cheeks flushed with indignation. "But they *should!* Unless blinded by their own love of power, they *should* see that his motives are clean!"

Papa's voice brought her to attention with a jolt. "And now, I'm going to ask Mrs. Herring to sing for us."

Mother scrambled to her feet, setting Gordon firmly on the bench and finding the hymn she knew he'd want. "Why doesn't he ever give me warning?" she fumed inwardly, but she knew it was because he himself never knew ahead of time what closing touch he would give his sermon.

The blind organist nodded at her whispered instructions, and she sang all four verses of "The Ninety and Nine" in a clear rich soprano. A ballad-like song, it had been made popular by Ira D. Sankey a few years previously.

"I'm so short of breath I'm glad Blanche Davis wasn't here to criticize," she said later as they drove slowly homeward. She shifted Gordon's sleep-heavy head to the other arm. Celia was already sprawled over Papa's lap.

"Might do her good," Papa said, still aglow from the response they'd received.

The air, rain-washed and cool, had an unbelievable clarity that had lured birds, rabbits, and an occasional chipmunk into unusual activity in the close-bordering woods.

When an oncoming buggy or wagon loomed around a curve, Papa reined in to a pause on the side of the road. The smell of loam excited him like heady perfume. "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could take some of this back to China with us?"

"Let's leave the red bugs, the ticks, and the snakes!" Mother shuddered. Suddenly it dawned on her how irrelevant such things must seem to Papa. This was to him a land of pristine glory—an Eden to be believed in. She smiled, ruefully. "There's always a snake in Eden, isn't there?"

Papa laughed. "I guess I'm a *k'u pi.* Funny how the Chinese say bitter skin where we use the term thick skin. Things like that just don't seem to bother me, and I'm glad of it."

"Did you hear what Miss Willie said to Gordon?" Mother's eyes danced.

"No. What?"

Mother had worked to perfect her mimicry. "Oh, you precious li'l dahlin'! Did you know I came near bein' youah mothah?"

Papa grinned. "Well, a miss is as good as a mile any day—better in this case. But you mark my words, the ladies are going in for missions in a way that will make their menfolk stand up and take notice. I don't think Paul meant women were to be ignored. Certainly the Lord didn't. That Samaritan woman was the first missionary, you might say."

But Mother took a slightly dimmer view of the status of women in Dixie. For one thing, she objected to their coy references to "limbs" instead of legs.

"But everybody in Australia knows that women have legs," she spluttered one warm evening as they were retiring. "And we're not ashamed of them either."

Papa laughed. "Oh, you have your inhibitions, too." He drew off one sock and inspected a lean foot gracefully arched, and his eyes twinkled. "By the way, perhaps it would be well for you not to attend Ethel's wedding in your, ah—delicate condition. She thinks it would be embarrassing to her."

"You're not serious!" Mother whirled. "That's the silliest thing I ever heard of," she cried. "Even in China. Do you remember what Kung Hsien-seng said to me before Celia was born?"

"I've forgotten. I remember only that it is a perfectly natural process over there, much more so than most Americans are willing to admit."

Mother pulled the hairpins from her hair and shook the heavy waves to her shoulders. There was something in the gesture like the tossing of a thoroughbred's mane. "Well, he just bowed in the most gentlemanly manner and said he hoped we'd have a fine son. Frankly, I prefer the more straightforward manner of the Chinese."

When Ralph was born, he won instant approval from all the family. As soon as the doctor left, Papa brought the children in from the yard to see their new brother. Pa came in from the porch to stand bashfully by the old cradle that he'd made for his own children years before. Ma and Bettie were busy straightening the room, while

Queenie, her arms filled with laundry, clucked admiration from the doorway.

Lying in the huge bed, Mother almost envied her babe. She wasn't too sure of her own acceptance in this primitive countryside. That was something nobody had thought to articulate. The strangeness of the birth rites, the scorn of the doctor for "newfangled ways o' doin' things," the harking back to many similar features of David's birth, all made her feel very much an outsider, in spite of the importance of her role.

"You name him, David," she said weakly. "I've named the others."

"Take a look at him, Ma. Is he more Wells, Newton, or Alderman?" Papa was sure this baby showed great promise. "Pa, whose name does he get?"

Mother blinked. Not even a term in ancestor-worshiping China had prepared her for this type of clannishness. For once, Papa's grin failed to reassure her. Were inherited traits from Australia less to be desired than those from America?

"I named you after your Grandpa Wells, and I'm sure it had much to do with your call to preach," Ma said, leafing through the family Bible for names rather to be chosen than great riches. "There's Nathan, or Isaac, or Jacob—all of 'em in your family tree, too."

"What about Ichpaddy?" Papa watched Mother's growing consternation with huge enjoyment. "He figured in John Herring's will back in 1773, I remember."

"Dave! You'd name him for a slave?" Bettie gasped.

"Let's call him Gabriel. We can shorten it to Gabe," Grandpa suggested.

"No," said Mother.

"It's an honorable name," Ma insisted. "Gabriel Herring's father Richard, son of John, supplied arms to Wash—"

"Not Gabriel," Mother repeated firmly.

"What shall we call the babe, George?" As usual, Papa had found the happy solution. Any suggestion from George was sure to find favor.

"Ralph," George said.

"Ralph Alderman it shall be," Papa decided without any more ado.

CHAPTER 15

A Charm From The Skies

*I*n the following months, Papa was more and more in demand to rally the cause of the Gospel Mission throughout the states east of the Mississippi. With a nursing baby, Mother couldn't travel with him, and Papa missed her keenly. He had small taste for the prodding of interest that seemed to be expected of him. Giving an account of his stewardship was one thing; whipping up enthusiasm was another. Dr. Crawford's resolve to keep independent of the Foreign Mission Board remained stout, but his frail body didn't. He died in Georgia in the spring of 1902.

"This means that you must now assume leadership," Mrs. Crawford wrote in reply to Papa's letter of condolence. "People are just as sheeplike today as they were when the Lord saw them 'without a shepherd.' I'm sure Elisha must have felt a diffidence like that you mention when he assumed the prophet's mantle."

Papa had just walked in from the mailbox, Gordon riding his shoulder and Celia skipping beside him. Mother stood under a line of fluttering diapers and read the letter aloud. Squinting against the brilliance of paper and sunlight, she smiled up at Papa.

"But I want no part of being a—a prophet!" Papa said. "Our people aren't children. If we do a good job of reporting in the Baptist press, the churches will rally to support us. I'm sure of that!"

"Missionary, prophet—what's the difference? The call is the important thing."

Papa frowned. "Now there's where you show your Episcopalian tendencies. There's a tremendous difference. Let's get on back to the field, shall we?" He nodded toward the letter. "She says she's heading back in September. Write her that we'll take passage on the same ship. My work's over there, not here."

By the time Ralph had passed his first birthday, plans were complete to join Mrs. Crawford in San Francisco and sail on the 3rd of October, 1902. Mother was surprised to find the leave-taking no easy job: she'd made a greater niche for herself in the little farm home than she'd realized. Especially did she sense Grandpa's affection.

His eyes followed Ralph toddling uncertainly across the yard. "We're just beginnin' to understand you good, and you have to leave! If you'd stay in this country, who knows, that baby might become President!"

Mother nodded toward George, who gyrated on the rail fence to the great amusement of the smaller children. "You'll have *him*," she said. "He's very much my boy, now, and we're going to miss him keenly."

True to his usual form, Papa left the expression of his emotions to Mother, while he busied himself with the packing. He couldn't mask a grim sense of finality in the impending farewells. Saying good-bye was about the only task Papa would have run from, if he could. His parents were only in their early sixties, but chances were slim that they'd live until he had another furlough. Southern farm folk at the turn of the century were old long before the allotted threescore and ten years. And the thought of leaving George behind to attend school brought back some of the old poignancy of parting with Maggie.

It wasn't surprising that the emotional upheaval left the Herrings exhausted and ready to welcome the change of pace entailed in an ocean voyage. Mrs. Crawford had been joined by her adopted daughter and son-in-law, Minnie and Albert Jones. She was being very brave about the loss of her husband, but there was a heavy gloom about her. Minnie, born of British parents and adopted when she was fourteen years old, had just parted from her own children, having left them in England with her husband's people. Albert tried manfully to keep things cheerful. He and Papa strode the decks together every morning before breakfast. Albert worked under the aegis of the English Baptist Board, but in general he was in sympathy with the Gospel Mission principles.

"Some aspects of this movement puzzle me," he admitted to Papa one morning. "Perhaps I could better understand this—this need for independence of action if I were American. We learn subservience to authority early in England. The tradition is especially clear in our universities."

"I know. And yet our cultural heritage from England has probably been the strongest single factor in the American quest for freedom." Papa turned up his collar against the head wind and eyed the younger man thoughtfully. "What makes you think these serious thoughts so early in the day? Is the old lady making you feel you ought to throw in your lot with us?"

Albert laughed. "Nothing so pointed as that! It's just that she doesn't realize how tightly her world is constricted by the very principles she talks about so sadly. She pretends to scorn the approval of the Southern Baptist majority, yet she resents their lack of appreciation for Dr. Crawford. Minnie's more influenced by her than she knows. I feel as if I'm wallowing in their self-pity."

"Must be worse than seasickness!" Papa grinned. "And you think this stems from our—our lack of a centralized authority?"

"Well, if you were told you *could* do this or *couldn't* do that, your resentment wouldn't be so diffused; it would be directed against your immediate superior, don't you see?"

"Very logical!" Papa said dryly. "Presupposing, of course, that resentment has its place in every life." He tugged at the heavy steel door, and the men stepped into the corridor. After the freshness outside, the air seemed stifling. Papa laid his hand lightly on Albert's shoulder. "You know, strangely enough, I've been thinking much about these very aspects of our organization. That's one reason I wanted no part of a supervisory position, myself. Very few people seem to understand, so I keep mulling it over and I'm frank to say I don't know the answers. One thing seems to come clear: a man's never safe from himself when he feels answerable only to God." He stopped before his cabin door and again he grinned. "That's why I'm glad I have Alice!"

In the next few weeks, as the travelers left the comforts of the ocean liner and began the slow struggle up the familiar reaches of the Grand Canal, one question engrossed them. What had the Boxers done to their friends and possessions? Had the little churches perished and the work of seven years been swept away? What of the small cache of housekeeping treasures? Would a new beginning have to be made? There had been no word from the natives, and the newspapers were full of contradictions. At best, they reflected only foreign opinions, which were generally shortsighted. The editorials were full of charges and countercharges in the aftermath of the Peking debacle. Certain nations courted public approval by advertising the size of their indemnities, as if moral questions could be translated into negotiable currency. In Shanghai, Papa thought he could detect a new attitude toward America, one nation that had not moved in to appropriate territory from the tottering Manchu regime. But the outlook was still full of uncertainties.

There had been a killing frost the night before the Herring houseboat nosed in beside other craft among the water-worn rocks just outside the city wall of Chining Chow. The water level was high, indicating that it had been a good year, and the ducks were fat. A dozen women whacked laundry on the rocks. *"Hai Hsien-seng whae lai liao!"* one of them shrilled. "Herring, First-born has returned!" In the crowd that gathered, Papa found an occasional familiar face. He grinned happily. He was again among neighbors, and that was enough.

Just before they reached the Gospel Hall gate, the crowd parted for a young cripple, whose powerful arms pulled the useless body on an ingenious series of blocks strapped to hands and knees. He hugged Papa's knees and somehow managed a kowtow toward Mother. His smile acknowledged the new baby.

"To welcome you home again I have not dared to hope!" he said.

Mother noted the carefully shaved forehead and neatly wound queue. *At least he hadn't gone back to begging!*

"He's the best peanut vendor in the city!" a voice from the crowd reported proudly. Papa's glance at Mother brimmed with content. If these people offered filial affection, how else than paternally could he respond?

Wang, grinning widely, met them at the courtyard gate, a baby in his arms. Three miniature Wangs peeped from behind his skirts.

With one surprised glance of recognition, Celia darted from door to door of the home. Everything looked just as it had when they left. Some tiles on the west wing were broken, and rain had damaged an empty chest of small value. The organ and silver reposed undisturbed beneath the little flag. Mother smiled her appreciation to Wang for his care of their possessions.

"We were lucky." Wang indicated his little family. "Christians in Buh Go suffered great loss." His fingers described an arc above the baby's head. "Was charmed circle from the heavens, venerable teacher?"

"Could be," Papa said. Then, in English to Mother and

Mrs. Crawford, "You'd almost think he knew our 'Home Sweet Home' and was quoting that part about the charm from the skies, wouldn't you?" He relinquished Ralph to Mother's arms and turned to the crowd standing expectantly in the chapel area. He held up hands for attention. "We came to your land as strangers. We lived among you as friends. We return as brothers." He indicated the benches clustered about the lectern he'd fashioned himself, years before. "Tomorrow, return and we'll have the hall prepared for worship again!"

The weaver's wife giggled and nudged her husband. "Tell the teacher," she ordered. "You don't need to fear. Tell him!"

"Tell him what?" Mrs. Crawford asked sternly.

"But I—I didn't mean any harm, O First-born. My neighbor who reads has helped me and we have been studying the *dao-li* (Gospel) here with any who cared to come. But I—"

"You couldn't have pleased me more," Papa said, beaming.

When Mrs. Crawford and the Joneses left for Tai An, Mother breathed a sigh of relief. It had been hard to keep the children from getting on the old sister's nerves. It had been harder still to live in the shadow of her virtues.

Several months later, when two single ladies arrived from America to augment their forces, Mother was much encouraged.

"Teacher has bought two secondary wives?" Wang inquired blandly.

Papa was only momentarily taken aback. He explained the Christian position on monogamy. "Really, the important thing was that he felt free to broach the subject at all," Papa said to Mother later. "We haven't come to substitute one set of rules for another. Wang's born again and he has an ear for the truth. He'll get straightened out eventually."

But, for the sake of those who had no such insight, other living arrangements were found for the new missionaries. One of them—a Miss Blanche Walker—crossed the city often to visit and became a great favorite in the Herring household. Unperturbed by the crudities of life in the interior, she wasn't too shocked to be often amused by the native disregard for personal hygiene. She noticed that Wang obeyed Mother's injunction against spitting—but only in her presence. Thereafter, whenever she heard a noisy clearing of throat, she'd race to the offender and usher him out to the yard, and both would be convulsed with laughter.

Mother was pregnant again, and the odor of garlic was more than usually obnoxious to her. She laid down the law to the servants. No garlic. She might as well have saved her breath—and theirs! Miss Walker suggested that the offending servant might take more pains with his diet if he had to clean up after Mother when the odor of garlic had made her sick. Lots of problems could be solved if only people were more forthright. Mother laughed, but she could never bring herself to adopt such countermeasures.

Miss Walker was more excited than most of the household over the expected fourth child. She encouraged Celia to pray for a sister. She saw no indication in the Bible, or elsewhere, that the Almighty concurred with the Chinese in favoring males. Thus it was that, when Susie was born, two people, at least, felt they had an answer to prayer.

Miss Walker took Celia on her lap to let her see the new baby. She fanned herself and smiled benignly in the heavy August heat.

Papa tried to interest two-year-old Ralph in his new sister. "She's blonde, like my side of the family," he said. But Ralph was indifferent.

"Don't forget, Father has blue eyes too," Mother said. "Her name's Susan, after my mother."

Miss Walker looked at Papa. "But you'll call her Susie, won't you? She's too little for a dignified name like Susan, now."

There was no question about Susie's belonging. Celia eyed the group solemnly. Miss Walker had *told* her she could ask for a little sister. Apparently anyone who wanted to could connive with the Creator. Fancy that! Gordon had taken his stance at the head of the bed by Mother. Celia felt vaguely superior to him. Gordon couldn't understand such matters. He'd probably never had a prayer answered.

As for Miss Walker, she felt she'd earned a moment of complacence. It wasn't every day that she could taste this keen satisfaction. She was a spinster, but that didn't keep her from having motherly instincts. After all, she'd played an important part in a miracle—a part that many mothers, too physically concerned, perhaps, often failed to realize. There was something intensely gratifying about the whole situation.

Eighteen months later when Alec was born, there was even more of a welcome, for the simple reason that there were more of us to make it. One icy day in February Papa charged into our room with his usual gusto. "Get up, everybody," he called, shucking Susie from her sopping clothes and helping Ralph fold his long underwear in the complicated way that left only a small lump on one side of his leg above shoes several sizes too big for him.

"Where's Mother?" Celia demanded, sensing his excitement.

"Mother's resting. Hurry up! I've something I want to show you. Here, help with these shoelaces, Celia." His fingers touched hers. "Child, your hands are like ice. Put on a sweater."

Gordon had crawled back on the *k'ang*, which was beginning to warm up a bit.

"But I have on two already," Celia objected. "And I don't have another, and besides, my hands are always cold, even in summer."

"Here, put on this." Papa held out a padded upper garment that Mother wore to visit in native houses even less heated than ours.

With her arms outstretched like wings and her hands completely swallowed, Celia fumed in the clumsy garment; but there was no thought of rebellion. Arguments with Papa fared badly, even when he wasn't in a tearing hurry. It was so frustratingly obvious that he had our welfare at heart!

"Here we are." Papa indicated the korey on the dining room table. "Now tell me what's in it. Everyone has one guess." The korey was a large wicker basket that expanded to enclose most of our worldly goods whenever we traveled.

"A puppy?" Ralph ventured hopefully.

"White rabbits?" Celia was still mourning for those that had burrowed their way to freedom from the clothes closet some months before.

"No, it's a cat," Gordon decided. "I heard one last night."

"It's a baybee," shrilled Susie from her vantage point in Papa's arms.

With each addition to the family the compound became more crowded. There was just no room for the philosophy of every-man-for-himself-and-the-devil-take-the-hindmost. In that respect we were exactly like our neighbors, the Chinese. We had a vivid regard for family solidarity. From the vantage point of later years, however, those compound walls seem to have had a somewhat inhibiting effect. So completely removed were we from the distractions of the "Jones's" way of living that we may have become—as our neighbors were said to be—too docile, too willing to accept the decisions of our elders. But it would seem that, anywhere in the world, having a family of five children must mean a certain amount of regimentation.

Perhaps the fact that nothing was too trivial to take to the Lord in prayer in itself established an easygoing relationship in the home that softened, somewhat, the edge of parental discipline. Certainly Papa's Sinai-thunderings frightened us not at all, for we could recognize in him a subjection to a still higher Authority in which there was no fear, only tender familiarity. But his subjection was never unctuous, or obtrusive. In fact, Mother often felt he needed reminders, just as we did, that he might, on occasions, be slightly—only slightly—out of line with his Father's will.

The day the hammer was lost for the umpteenth time, Papa, visibly perturbed, had routed children and servants to hunt for it, frantically, diligently, and unsuccessfully. Mother's patient request at prayers that night held more than a hint of disapproval of his impatience.

"It's all very well to ask the Lord to help us find the hammer," Papa stormed. "But I'll bet that carpenter stole it, and if so, he needs a lesson!"

"We can't expect God to answer our prayers if we harbor unproved suspicions," Mother said.

A few weeks later the hammer was discovered, not stolen, not even rusted, at the bottom of the newly-cleaned well. Mother turned an I-told-you-so expression toward Papa, which he parried with the grimace of a small boy caught in a prank.

Once Ralph locked himself in the bedroom with a bottle of pills, placidly sucking the sweet off each and spitting out the calomel centers. Papa wouldn't have resorted to cajolery, even if his son's life had been in danger. Not even to himself would he admit any lack of authority, much less to us.

"If you don't unlock that door and come out right away, I'll wear you out!" Papa threatened, glowering into the narrow latticed window that opened from the bedroom to the courtyard.

No answer.

"I can wait," Papa said. This we doubted, but nobody said so.

Still no movement from within.

"Let me climb through the window," Gordon said. But Papa silenced him with a glance. Admit that his word was ineffective? Never.

"Bring me a switch, Gordon," he said clearly. "A big one."

With the sound of Gordon's footsteps retreating, the quiet became deafening.

"If—if I come out now will you promise not to whip me?" Ralph quavered finally in a small voice.

None of us would have chosen to engage in family prayers. We accepted them as inevitable, along with the heat of summer and the cold of winter and the boredom of lessons. Always the baby sat in Papa's lap as he began the reading. From our position in the circle we could count out the verse that would fall to our lot and begin readying ourselves for our share of King James's English. Those who couldn't read piped the phrases after Mother. We ploughed through book after book, one from the Old Testament, followed by one from the New.

"There, that's a good name for your son, someday," Papa interrupted. "Break it into syllables and get it right: *M-e*, Me, *p-h-i-b*, fib, *o*, o, *s-h-e-t-h*, sheth. Mephibosheth. See how easy it is?"

While Papa was strong on syllabication, Mother felt we should digest etymology with our ABC's. "*Phil*ippians, *phil*anthropy, *Phil*adelphia. Remember your Greek roots."

The reading was always followed by prayer. Obediently, we turned and buried our noses in the foul-smelling cushions of our chairs. While our elders reverently addressed the Lord, we'd surreptitiously kick toward the forest of legs behind us, careful to avoid those of our parents. Too callow to understand that there was nothing perfunctory in the long prayers that ran the gamut of life's problems, domestic, mission, and world, we nevertheless gleaned lasting impressions about the God our elders worshiped. He was always accessible. He had a sense of humor. And because of a durable relationship between us, He was always interested in our concerns, no matter how trivial. Like Papa, He was easy to live with.

Once, when a flurry of banditry in the province scared several mission families into finding refuge with us, Mother felt she was enduring a nightmare of never-ending picnicking, with not just five, but three times as many children to feed and keep whole. The house was literally bursting at the seams of its papered windows. To preserve their sanity, the adults took turns supervising our play, telling us stories, showing us how to make toys from *kao-liang* stalks, playing the organ for musical chairs in the yard.

One night Gordon appeared at the table broken out with a bright scarlet rash. Mother had been too busy to notice his fractiousness all day, or she might have read the signs.

"Gordon!"

"Yes, Mother."

"What have you been up to?" She felt his forehead. "You *have* something and it looks like scarlet fever to me."

By morning the guests had folded their tents like the Arabs and silently stolen away, choosing the peril of banditry in preference to that of scarlet fever. Gordon was sick with an ear infection for a long time afterwards and lost a lot of weight. But he was the only one to take the fever, and we naturally concluded that there was a definite connection between the Great Physician and our protection from the pestilence that walked in darkness or the destruction that wasted at noonday.

As far as he could, Papa tried to compensate for the privations we knew. Every time he returned from the market place there was the same little ritual. "*Ee, erh, san, sze, wu, liu, chih; chih, liu, wu, sze, san, erh, ee.*" At the finish of the count to seven and back he dropped his hands, spilling peanuts in every direction from his copious sleeves. I think we knew better than most children what it meant to have something up one's sleeve.

In the ensuing scramble, when it seemed to the little ones that the race was always to the swift and the battle to the strong, he dropped handfuls conveniently near the least of us so that everybody was satisfied.

Inevitably there was the light touch about Papa's practice of economies.

"What are you ashamed of, Celia?" he demanded as we were posing one day for a family photo to be taken by a camera-owning friend. "Hold your head up."

Lacking the courage to criticize Papa's barbering openly, Celia muttered to Susie, "Don't you hide my dress. Papa's haircuts always make me look like a boy, and my dress should prove I'm a girl."

"What have you done to your knee?" Mother caught sight of underwear glowing through the hole in Ralph's stocking. "Here, David, hold the baby while I see if I can find another stocking for him."

"No," Papa objected. "We can't keep Brother Bostick waiting all day. Get your hat and hold it on your knee, Ralph."

As quarters became more crowded, Papa called in a mason to enlarge the living room by extending a large bay into the courtyard. From the leftover brick he had a small playhouse built in the yard. Making a homey atmosphere in the bleak expanded room was Mother's miracle. In the niches originally intended for idols were small treasures, a Dresden china shepherdess and a Florentine-mosaic picture frame, tiny and exquisite, enclosing a picture of Grandmother Rea taken when she was a dark-haired lass in Wales. Against the walls, but not too close because of the dampness, were the books without which we could not have imagined any kind of existence. But aside from these, there was little of Western culture.

Even if we could have afforded otherwise, Christmas with Papa would always have been a casual affair. "It's a hang-over from Catholicism," he grumbled. But Papa was no Scrooge. Unable to find an evergreen, he suspended a bare date tree from the rafters of the living room so we could decorate it with paper chains and blown-candy animals. Mother pumped the baby organ and taught us Christmas songs. "Joy to the World" was her favorite, and ours. There was something terribly exciting about the idea of mustering a chorus of rocks, hills, and plains in response to the reedy whine of the baby organ and our childish sopranos.

The gifts we exchanged were all homemade. Papa dispensed peanuts and pomegranates with a bland impartiality. He was always conscious of our relative wealth as compared with the Chinese.

Once a year Auntie Ce's generosity had a way of eclipsing both Christmas and China New Year. With an insight born of longing for children of her own, she remembered each of us with gifts designed to stimulate our budding talents. No shopping expedition could have provided half the excitement of watching Papa pull the screeching nails from the box and litter the floor with packing.

Enraptured, we clutched our gifts and beamed. Celia held in her arms a gorgeous china doll, its red wool dress exquisitely smocked in white.

Susie immediately lost interest in her own hand-knitted sweater.

"Let Susie hold the doll just a minute," Mother told Celia.

Reluctantly, Celia extended the precious doll toward Susie's eager little hands. Susie spun around to show the doll to Papa, and tumbled in the confusion of paper and excelsior. The crash of china on the hard dirt floor was followed by a moment of stunned silence, a moment fraught with the tragic finality of death.

"I'll glue the head together," Papa said finally. "See, here are two fairly large pieces." But not even Papa could bring the dead to life.

Mother put her arms about Celia, her own eyes wet. "Anyway, I'm mighty proud of my girl's generosity," she said. But her compliment, even with all the rarity of diamonds, could scarcely replenish the till of happiness. Mother's stricken eyes sought Papa's. It was harder to rectify a mistake in judgment than to mend a shattered doll.

Mother had much ado to keep off the debit side of the ledger of faith anyway. Always she tried to live up to Papa's expectations of her, but we could sense occasional times of frustration.

"How are we going to educate these children?" she asked once before Mary was born.

"Our job is to see that they have an appetite for education," Papa said. "Did either your parents or mine try to peer into *our* futures?"

"But—but if something should happen to you?"

That, however, was an eventuality so far removed from our thoughts as to seem ludicrous. Wasn't Papa equal to any emergency? What could possibly throw him off stride?

Whenever she had to sew, Mother went into a blue funk. Just the thought of cutting irrevocably into the material gave her the jitters. "I warned you when you were courting that I couldn't sew, remember?" She looked helplessly at the yards of bright silk, made on narrow Chinese looms, and spread now across the dining room table.

Her problem was admittedly serious. Papa had come up with the bright idea of combining the virtues of warmth and economy in a reversible dress for Celia. He'd even gone so far as to draw a paper pattern to help Mother. To be worn as a durable blue serge on weekdays, the dress was to blossom into red silk on Sundays.

"Oh, but I knew you could learn!" he said. "There's nothing to it, really, and I'll help, see?"

"The Bible says, 'Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together.' "

"Well, this is woollen and silk," Papa retorted, and winked at Celia. "Besides, 'the devil can cite Scripture for his purpose,' I'm told."

We were somewhat less tractable than Mother in following Papa's cues, especially when it came to economies at the table. Sugar was expensive and had to be shipped in from Shanghai. The sugar bowl, part of Mother's wedding gift from Uncle Leonard, was made on generous lines, and we helped ourselves from it liberally.

"Do you want to get sugar-diabetes?" Papa demanded of Gordon, who was spooning milk over his oatmeal to drown the telltale crystals.

"Perhaps we should begin to serve the native bean molasses," Mother suggested helpfully.

"I never saw any white sugar until I was almost grown," Papa said. "We used molasses."

"We ate treacle," Mother said. "Always bread and butter and treacle. Only, when Father's investments turned out poorly, it was bread and mutton drippings and treacle. Leonard used to say our house should be called Bethlehem, the house of bread."

"Sounds too much like Alice in Wonderland," Celia objected.

"And I suppose we'll have to live in a well, too!" Gordon said.

"What's treacle?" Susie asked. The boys had an irritating way of ignoring the girls, but Susie was determined to make it as difficult as possible for them.

"And Susie can be the dormouse," he continued. "If she asks too many questions we'll just cram her into the teapot, and *that* will be *that!*"

CHAPTER 16

Cows, Sacred And Profane

*T*he mid-July sun poured into our courtyard, causing the air to shimmer across the wall-bound area. An elm hung over the well, but its foliage was too thin to furnish much shadow. Rather, it seemed to point up the confusion that always attended a Herring exodus. Two koreys lay open, and clothes of every description hung from the tree branches.

It was always exciting to watch preparations for a trip. Susie rocked cheerfully in the little rocker, an antique left us by former missionaries. She was very much attached to the little chair. In fact, her leg was tied to it at the moment in punishment for having run off to play with the children next door. Mother and she'd had a running battle on that score for some time.

Mother came to the door, shading her eyes with a large palm-leaf fan. She always looked a bit ethereal when *enceinte*. Now she wore a vaguely troubled expression. She knew better than to frustrate Papa's well-meaning efforts. They'd need an early start toward Tai Shan in the morning, and this was his way of insuring it, leaving nothing to the last minute. But his methods were scarcely hers.

He tossed books, pillboxes, shaving paraphernalia, and clothes lightly into the outspread bedding, which was then folded up like an omelet, wrapped in yellow oilcloth, and stoutly strapped to a size that would fit on one side of a wheelbarrow.

"There," he said, straightening up. "It gets cold on the mountain, remember?" He suddenly realized she was standing. "Fetch your mother a chair, Ralph. Hurry with that rope, Gordon. Do you think we have all day?"

Papa was always asking us if we had all day. If it wasn't *our* day, whose was it? It was all most confusing.

Mother took the proffered chair and nodded soberly. Papa was right. It could get cold on Tai Shan. She remembered when a trip to the mountains in the summer seemed wonderful. The floating mists and ancient temples were sights to cherish. But for the privilege, could she stand camping under conditions even more primitive than those here in Chining Chow? What if the baby should decide he couldn't wait until she got down from the mountain to the doctor's home in Tai An?

"You—you'll stay with us until after the baby comes, won't you?"

Papa sat on the well curb and mopped his neck and face with a native blue handkerchief. "Let's see. That means part of September, doesn't it? Of course I'll stay. But don't you see, if you'd let me hint to Uncle David about that motorcycle, I could have taken you to the mountains and come back here for several weeks' work and still made it to Tai An in plenty of time."

Mother was unimpressed by the thought of a motorcycle. "Did you come to China to break your neck on one of those things?" She was very familiar with Papa's pipe dream of owning an Indian motorcycle. In fact, it was that very pipe dream that had led to the naming of the latest heifer. "Maybe if you call her Indiana, you'll get that other—that other wild Indian off your mind," she said dryly. And the name had stuck.

She fanned herself a few moments and sighed. "We're taking George Washington?"

George Washington (so named for having been born on February 22) was the pedigreed Jersey bull calf that Papa had brought up from Shanghai several months previously. George Washington had grown fat and frisky on Borden's Eagle Brand milk all the way up the canal and, whenever he could break loose from his confines, still followed Papa around the yard like a puppy. Papa was awfully proud of George Washington. "With that animal we'll have cows someday that will furnish the chil'ren all the milk they need!" he used to say. Papa never called him a bull. According to him, no one in Dixie mentioned the word.

"No," he answered to Mother's question. "I've decided to leave him here with Wang's nephew, Liu. I don't know how he'd fare on that tough mountain grass."

"So George Washington doesn't need to go to the mountains for his health?" Ralph eyed Papa to see if his teasing was edging too closely on impertinence. Ralph could usually get by with near murder.

Mother's eyes danced.

Papa wasn't looking for impertinence at the moment, however. "Gordon's old enough to learn to milk. I'll teach him this summer."

As soon after day as he could get us moving, Papa had the caravan of wheelbarrows shoving off. With two passengers carefully balanced, one on each side of the wheel, the barrowman adjusted the wide cloth band that went from handle to handle over his shoulders. Then, with a grunt, he hoisted his end of the load. Gordon failed to anchor his feet against the footrail and landed in the dust in front of the clumsy vehicle. He and Ralph laughed uproariously. We must have been quite an impressive spectacle: one that none of our neighbors wanted to miss. Certainly there was no secret about our departure, for each wheel shrieked in ungreased protest every foot of the way. The walls of the narrow street echoed the din until we escaped to the rutted roads outside the city gate.

So it must have been to travel in Palestine, even in the days of Jacob and Esau. We found it easy to realize an affinity with the patriarchs. The chief difference was the size and shape of the respective flocks. What ours lacked in size was made up in importance, however. Indiana's welfare was paramount. Her comfort, more than that of any of us with the possible exception of Mother, set the pace for the trek. Leah and Rachael must have fared better.

Three days of grimy travel found us wheeling wearily into the compound where the Kings lived. Dr. King and her husband lived in much grander style than we did. They had transformed a native compound into a verdant yard with an oasis of trees. In the distance and far beyond the city walls loomed the great mountain sacred to the memory of Confucius.

In the morning there was more dickering with coolies for the transference of passengers and baggage to sedan chairs and *tiao-tze* (carrying poles), means more suitable than wheelbarrows for the climb up Tai Shan. There was something terrifying about the inevitable clamor. A coolie threw down a string of cash in violent disgust.

Perhaps we would be going nowhere at all!

"Take it or leave it!" Papa shouted. "We don't have to depend on you. I can buy myself a *tiao-tze*, too."

How we hated for Papa to lose face so! Imagine him, carrying an ordinary *tiao-tze!*

"Do you *have* to shout, David?"

Papa glared.

"*La, la pu shiu!*" muttered one of the coolies, ready to capitulate. "Don't talk so much. Not all *da-bi-tze* (big-nosed ones) fools!" Despite the reference to Papa's big nose, we recognized a backhanded compliment when we heard one.

The trip up the mountain took most of the day, with Indiana setting the pace, as usual. Alec and Susie were small enough to be carried in baskets on a *tiao-tze*, but neither enjoyed being classified as mere baggage. When Ralph's short legs tired, he was hoisted into the chair with Mother. The others walked.

Papa led us over the crest of the mountain and to an old temple about half a mile down the other side. We made ourselves at home in the barn-like structure. The dust of ages clung to the rough brick interior, some forty feet square. The hideous idol in the center of the room didn't seem to mind our settling in, any more than he minded the rats that scurried on the dusty rafters overhead. Apparently there were food offerings enough to keep them vigorous, although not enough to erase the scowl from the eight-armed idol that leered down upon us. Papa hung his hat on one of the arms and set about sweeping the hard earthen floor and setting up cots.

From under the dipping eaves, we gazed out with awe at the unaccustomed grandeur spread before us. It was so wonderfully different from the stench and clamor of the plains. Luxuriant cedars and gigantic rocks of fantastic shapes under softly floating mists combined to substantiate China's claim of being a celestial land—a claim that had seemed ludicrous from other points of view. Of course we children had known nothing better. Only Mother, trailing clouds of glory from Australia which was her home, found the fleas, the mildew, and the rats hard on what she stoically called "the flesh." Papa, however, was inclined to think Mother's lack of enthusiasm due less to trailing clouds of glory than to shades of some kind of prison house. He never wanted the comforts of former days to fetter the enjoyment of the present.

Sometimes in the night we would be roused from sleep to watch an exciting chase. Papa had decided to kill a rat.

"Hit him if he comes that way, Gordon," Papa said on one such occasion, handing him a club of sorts. "Celia, don't let him get out that door!"

Ralph jumped up and down in high glee. “Let me, let me!” he shrilled.

“Hold still with that can’le, Alice.” Papa cautiously moved the korey with one hand, the other readying the .32-caliber pistol.

“Careful with that thing, David. Don’t shoot the children!” Mother feared the rats, but she feared guns more.

The rat, exposed, apparently decided to risk the least in size of the menacing evils and scampered over Ralph’s toes, only to be further terrified by the ensuing yell.

“Bang!” Papa’s rice-loaded charge caught him just as he was darting under the threshold, and everybody settled down again for sleep.

Occasionally a worshiper, making the additional pilgrimage over the mountain crest, showed surprise at finding a whole family of foreign devils.

“Don’t mind us,” Papa assured him. “We are just visiting your celestial land and enjoying the heavenly mountains.”

In the mornings Papa and Mother pored over the native classics and their Chinese Bibles, but in the afternoons we had Papa to ourselves. Sometimes he took us on hikes to other templed peaks and we scurried over ancient rock paths in search of flowers, ferns, and butterflies. The priests served us tea and sesame cakes and asked question after question. At the Inscription without Words, there were sure to be a score or more of pilgrims who found us more remarkable than the ancient tablet, said to have been set up two milleniums ago by the Emperor Chin, notorious builder of the Great Wall.

"Why do you suppose they call it an inscription when there's nothing on it?" Gordon asked.

"Why did Mendlessohn call his music 'Songs without Words'?" Celia fell into the role of answering our questions whenever Mother was absent. "Perhaps the words wore off."

Gordon and Ralph clambered to overhanging rocks for a better view. An old crone, leaning crookedly on her staff, cackled over our antics.

"They feed on the milk of cows," she told the bystanders with the assumption of authority that went with age. "My nephew saw one squeezing it out once. That's why their skin is white. Too bad their hair is so ugly. I could tell them of a dye that would make it glossy and straight and black."

"Boys from girls, who can tell the difference? Such a way to dress!" a young man commented. "They don't know how to make lily-feet, apparently."

The old woman lifted Susie's skirt with gnarled fingers. Susie ducked out of reach and pointed to a red rag sewed on the old woman's sleeve. "What's that for?" she countered.

Delighted to hear their own language, the crowd moved closer. Personal questions were their meat and drink. The old woman bared her arm to show the boil under the scrap of cloth. "Isn't that the way you keep people from hurting *your* sores?" she asked, curious about the ways of foreigners.

"Come on, Susie," Celia called. "They'll keep you all day!"

Papa found a spring where we could get delightfully cold water. Since it was not surface water, it was safe to drink without being boiled. He rigged up a shed for Indiana and the cowman. He always took charge of the milking and the scouring of the vessels himself, however. Mother felt there were other more important uses for the money than to pay for a bovine valet, but Papa judged her opinions on finances to be of little moment. Women shouldn't bother their pretty heads on that score. He never got around to changing his mind about the matter until his daughters grew old enough to be buying "cokes" at college.

Often Papa took us to picnic at the Water Screen Cave, where we dashed excitedly through the spray of the cataract until we were wet and bedraggled, but cool. Once Mother invited Albert Jones to share the outing with us. He was living in a hermit's cave a short distance from us, Minnie having rejoined the children in England for some reason. Although Mother felt sorry for the slight, lonely man grappling alone with a language his wife had been born to, she admired his determination.

"Those rocks *are* rather slick!" Mr. Jones said.

"Come on, Celia. You won't mind it once you get wet!" Papa always insisted we try anything once. He was determined that none of us should be handicapped by fears.

"I don't like to get my hair wet," Celia objected. "Weren't *you* ever afraid? How about that night at the inn when the Boxers—"

"Sure, I was afraid, but if I'd run from them, we'd all have died."

"Well, I don't think much of your way of teaching me not to be afraid of the dark!"

"What did I do?"

"You made me run around the compound wall all by myself one night."

"So what? Nothing devoured you."

"But something *could* have," Celia insisted.

"Over my dead body!" Papa growled, and we all felt very sorry for people whose security depended on a mere Rock of Gibraltar or stuff like that.

One night Indiana and the cowman failed to return. Papa chafed at the delay until well after dark; then, fearing something had happened not only to Indiana but to the boy as well, he hiked up the hill to the temple on the crest. Would some of the apprentices help him? Two of them would. Wang, the cook, was dispatched to enlist the help of Mr. Jones and Mr. Bostick, who were living further down the mountain. Teamed into three pairs, they were to separate and scour the mountains by torchlight. Papa loaded his pistol carefully.

"Wh—what are you going to do with that?" Mother gasped.

"*I'm* not going to do anything. *You* are," Papa said. "Fire once if she's found alive, and twice if she's dead, and three times if the boy's dead too."

Mother spluttered. "Now, David, you know I cahn't—I don't know which end the bullets come from."

"Then you'd better learn in a hurry!" He was off in the dark, the torches smoking eerily.

It was a long vigil. The smaller children slept, but Gordon and Celia watched with Mother.

"Let me fire the gun, Mother," Gordon begged.

"No, if there's to be any further sacrifice to a sacred cow, it'll not be you." Mother's voice was sharpened by anxiety. "What if your father should tumble down one of those dreadful cliffs himself?"

About three o'clock the cook and the young Taoist monk returned. "The cow is dead at the foot of the Cliff for Resting Horses," they reported. "And the boy, afraid of your wrath, has fled."

So it was that Mother, screwing up her courage and feeling very much the pioneer, fired the pistol in two echoing blasts. Instead of milk, we all ate beef for a few days, but nobody was very enthusiastic about it somehow.

August was a rainy month, and for days the sun seemed washed out of the sky. Bushes and trees sagged in the steady downpour, and everything smelled of mildew. Life in the clouds was not for terrestrials such as we were; we quarreled and complained.

Then, one night, the elements must have decided on a second Deluge—but in hours, not days. There was no sleep for anyone. The lightning was almost continuous. Thunder crashed from cliff to cliff in a primeval fury. We huddled about Papa and watched through the door as flashes lit up the now unrecognizable scene. Trees writhed before the lashing torrents. Now and again something struck the tiles above us, and a steady leak widened. And constantly the rain sluiced down. At intervals a deeper, more ominous sound than that of the thunder seemed to make the mountain itself shudder.

For once there was little conversation. There just didn't seem to be much to say.

"Keep clear of that idol," Mother said. "I don't fancy his falling upon us." Her words seemed to break a spell.

But Papa was still bemused. "Wonderful! Awful!" he said reverently. We knew he wasn't referring to the idol, which kept its fear-inspiring stance, all eight arms still aloft. At last the storm spent itself and we fell asleep.

The clear brilliance of the following morning found us investigating the devastation about us. Now we knew what the rumblings of the night before had been. Great raw wounds gaped where once verdant bluffs had stood. It seemed as if the very entrails of the mountain had been dumped in a vast confusion below us. The path to the temple was blocked by a slide of rocks and mud. We had to scramble across a ledge on all fours. The priests were talking excitedly. There'd been nothing like this on the mountain in all its long history.

The entrance to Mr. Jones's cave was buried under one of the slides. Rescue operations were hastily begun, although everyone knew he couldn't have survived. Late in the day they reached him. He had been kneeling beside his bed. Papa sent the girls home to Mother with the news to shield them from the gruesome sight, but the boys stayed to help. The next day the body was carried down the mountainside to be buried in the little plot near where the Crawfords lived. And whenever our parents spoke of Mr. Albert Jones, mention was made of his having died praying, as if death, for all its finality, had been robbed of the last word. The following week, we ourselves moved down the mountain.

The claims on a missionary were ubiquitous in those days. Need was everywhere. Papa found as much to do in Tai An awaiting the blessed event as he'd have found in Chining. And certainly Mother wasn't idle. The loose native garments which she wore were fashioned for a life of activity, and she was convinced that even a sixth call to motherhood didn't relieve her of being a missionary.

One Sunday night in September Mother played the baby organ at the native services, valiantly trying to lead the singing with two or three hundred other voices each carrying on an independent cacophony. She returned to the compound to give birth to Mary so nearly on the stroke of midnight that there was always controversy as to whether she was Sunday's child, or Monday's.

"What's that?" Susie demanded sleepily, hearing a wail.

"Your new baby sister," Celia said.

"Tisn't," she retorted.

"Make the most of her," Dr. King said to Papa, referring to the tiny black-eyed baby. "She's the last one!"

Papa did. He scouted around to find a wet nurse who would agree to come to Chining. "Let me leave Bao Pei with his grandmother," the amah begged. But Papa wanted no part in the neglect of her infant any more than of his own. We now had two babies instead of one.

Once on the return trip, little "Precious," asleep in the front of the caravan, woke and began to cry. His mother was holding Mary in the rear. Papa picked up the squalling infant and cycled back to deposit the baby with his mother.

"Hold him high as you pass along so the bystanders will know I wasn't kidnaping him," Papa told her.

At another time, from his vantage point in the lead, Papa looked back and saw the *erh pa shou* (wheelbarrow; lit., two pairs of hands) topple over, depositing Mother and Mary in the ditch.

He stormed at the barrowman. Then, "Are you hurt?" he asked Mother.

"N-nothing but my pride, I guess!" she said shakily, dabbing at the mud on the baby's clothes.

Home again at the familiar compound in Chining, Papa could hardly wait to dismiss the barrowmen before going back to see how George Washington had grown.

"*Shiao shin,*" the second boy said. "Be careful!" But the words meant "go with little heart," not "go with great care." Papa had no idea his little animal had put away calfish things and become a bull.

A few moments later there was a sudden shrilling of voices from the rear and the cook raced in, his queue snaking behind him. "The teacher! the teacher!" he gasped.

Mother dropped Mary into Brother Blalock's lap and darted off to the scene.

"David! David!" She groaned as she caught sight of him, his face ashy, the blood dripping from the side Liu was trying to support. Then he was down on the ground and Mother had taken charge.

"The scissors, Celia. A pillow, Gordon. Don't crowd about. And don't you move, David."

Deftly she slit the *ku-tze,* the flimsy Chinese pants that were already tight over the swelling hip. "Oh, for a doctor!" she breathed.

"Pour in the turpentine," Papa ordered through clenched teeth. "And don't stop even if I holler!"

Mother's training as a nurse in Sydney hadn't included faith in the therapeutic value of turpentine. But the years married to a North Carolina farm boy had not been spent in vain. She poured in turpentine like any good Tar Heel.

Later, ensconced in bed, his face still pale but not deathly, Papa smiled feebly. "I just can't get over it," he said, and though it seemed an odd time for reverence, there was something in his manner that could only be so characterized.

"You'll get over it," Mother said, but she didn't sound very convincing. "You'll get over it by the grace of God." Then, as if conscious that activity alone would dispel the panic that still gripped her, "Set the basin down, Susie, and pick up those socks."

"That animal!" Papa said. "I just can't get over the way he acted." Fumbling under the pillow, he drew out a handkerchief to dab at Susie's nose and the tears streaking down her face. Mother took the handkerchief and wiped the moisture from his own forehead.

"Yes, yes, David, but don't talk about it now."

But Papa had to talk about it, apparently. "There he was, straddling me, tearing up the dirt on each side!" His voice was frighteningly faint. "I thought he meant to finish me then and there!"

"You mustn't think about it now. Try to get some rest, my dear!"

Papa held up his hand as he did when he was pronouncing a benediction. "You know what? That animal just stopped and stared down at me. I tell you it was as if he'd been pulled back by an invisible hand."

"He was," Mother said fervently. " 'The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him—' "

"Then why didn't the angel keep the bull from hurting Papa at all?" Susie demanded.

Neither of them so much as noticed her. "Can it be that I'm that important to the Lord? *Me?*"

Mother leaned over to kiss him in a demonstration so rare that Susie knew the moment was sacred. "We don't have to struggle for vindication with a Father, David. *You* should know that! The most important thing to God is His children!"

His eyes met hers. "And that means nothing else really matters, doesn't it?"

"Nothing else really matters," Mother repeated and kissed him again. "Come on out, Susie, and let your father rest."

Mother braced herself for the avalanche of questions on entering the hubbub of the living quarters. "Will Papa die? How long is he going to be sick? Will we be going to America now?"

"Do you want me to go for Dr. King?" asked Mr. Blalock, who was recuperating from dysentery and unable to be on his feet for long at a time.

Mother put her hands over her eyes and her shoulders shook. "Is that what it took Job so long to learn?" she asked shakily.

"Job?" Mr. Blalock looked bewildered. "What's Job got to do with Brother Herring's condition?"

Mother began to tremble and groped for a seat. She covered her face with her handkerchief, and for a moment we couldn't tell if she were laughing or crying. Finally it came out, jerkily between tears and laughter. "I think s-some day," she said and blew her nose to steady her voice. "I-I think s-some day Job and David will laugh t-together over this. For J-Job, it took a whirlwind, but David—well, David had to learn from a b-bull!"

CHAPTER 17

That Door Of Virtues

For six months after his encounter with George Washington, Papa walked on crutches.

"We are thankful that your life was spared," Mrs. Crawford wrote. "Could it be that the Lord means that dairying is hardly in keeping with the avowed purpose of the mission? I do not mean to criticize, but the thought has occurred to me. You remember the poem my sainted husband wrote of the true purposes of the church?

She spends no time or funds on show, nor votes to build a spire
Surpassing all within the town to make the folks admire!
She puts no trust in rites or modes, in science, tool, or skill
To reconstruct the human soul, or change the carnal will.

Papa passed the letter across the breakfast table to Mr. Blalock. "That would have angered me once, you know."

Mr. Blalock read the letter slowly and passed it to his wife. They exchanged a glance. "But you *will* get rid of the animal, won't you?" Mr. Blalock had a wistfulness about him that Papa found harder to meet than Mrs. Crawford's militant loyalty. Only last year, little Alice Blalock, named for Mother, had been buried after a simple service held in our living room. A baby boy had also died in infancy, shortly after the Boxer uprising. Papa was not one to ignore the opinions of a man who'd suffered as he had.

"But you *will* get rid of the animal, won't you?" The question seemed to hang in mid-air.

"Of course not. Dehorning is all he needs." Papa wasn't giving up his dream of better milk cows for anyone's narrow-mindedness. Actually his venture was to prove a great boon to many missionaries, not only in Shantung, but in Honan as well.

In the early spring, Papa received an invitation to come to Honan and help missionaries Lawton and Sallee, who were establishing a Southern Baptist center in Chengchow, under the aegis of the Board. Chengchow was strategically situated, not far from Kaifeng, the capital of the province, and on the Lunghai Railway connecting Peking and Hankow. Upon his return, Papa was full of enthusiasm about the prospect of an evangelistic center there. He'd found the brethren in full accord with his emphasis on spiritual freedom and anxious to secure his help. True, they all wore foreign dress. But the need for wearing native clothes just didn't exist where railroads were bringing in foreign manners and trade.

Times had changed, even in China, where change came slowly. The United States had enunciated what it called the Open Door Policy. The sporadic fighting between Russia and Japan over Chinese territory had moved

Theodore Roosevelt to take steps which led to the signing of a treaty in September, 1905. The Empress Dowager had been stripped of her power, and no one of the foreign nations was inclined to bolster the Manchu regime any longer. But as the Sage of Shantung put it, *the door of virtues is hard to open.* Papa was surer than ever that virtue had no "made in America" label, even though he was grateful for the softening of tensions on the political scene. Suppose this Open Door Policy were to give a new impetus to his crusade for spiritual freedom? Nothing could please him more!

Again the courtyard was littered, this time with bicycle parts. We could always tell when Papa was facing an important decision by the way he tackled a job that required manual dexterity. He'd hoped to make the repairs before his journey to Chengchow, but the box from Montgomery Ward had been slow in arriving.

"Well, it held up anyway," he said proudly. "That's a good wheel! Those newfangled pneumatic tires wouldn't have stood the strain!"

Mother looked up from her knitting. "David! Your best gown!"

"Plague take it! I always forget!" He looked down ruefully at the grease on the front of his *kwa-tze.* "I'd be glad to shed these things for good if we'd not made such an issue over them. Funny how issues as well as clothes seem to shrink in the wash!"

"You're going to run into a lot of criticism again, and from those who believed in you most, too—if you decide to return to the Board."

Papa shrugged. "It's nice to have folks believe in you, but if they believe in your God, that's enough." He rotated the sprocket wheel slowly and grinned with satisfaction. "You know, I lost all my money the second day out of Suei Pei."

"Oh, David!" Mother shook her head. "What will you do next?"

"No telling," Papa said blithely.

"Well, aren't you going to tell me what happened?"

"You're interested?"

Mother registered exasperation.

"Well, you know those chains of cash weren't ever made for carrying on bicycle han'les. I don't know when they fell off. I just know I was hungry as an elephant when I missed 'em."

"Were there any foreigners in the area?"

"Not within fifty li, I'd say!"

"Oh, David! Well, what did you do?"

"I was already at the market place, so I just stood and watched until I saw a man with a good face. I went up to him and told him what had happened, and asked him if he'd lend me some money. He looked me over carefully and asked how much. I told him, and he took me to his home, served me tea, and lent me the full amount. Of course I returned it on my way home. Just like that! Nothing to it really."

Mother shook her head. "You can get into the most predicaments!"

Papa shrugged. "Well, just so I get out of them, eh?"

Mother smiled and looked at him tenderly. She didn't believe in being lavish with her praise, but we knew her sun rose and set in Papa. When Papa told the incident in later years, he'd always ask his audience if they thought the same thing would have happened to a Chinese stranded in America. No one ever seemed to know the answer to that, however.

In June we went in a houseboat down the canal to Shanghai to enter Mother in the hospital for an operation that Dr. King had said she needed. We stowed our belongings for the duration of the trip and hung up our hats, briefly. Life aboard a houseboat was infinitely easier than an overland trek by wheelbarrows or carts. In fact, we children found it terribly exciting. The boys hopped out and raced barefooted along the tow paths, absorbing the jargon of the trackers and the lore of the ancient countryside. Mother read *Gulliver's Travels* aloud to us and taught us English history. Papa introduced us to the use of the abacus and long division.

The business of hanging up our hats proved easier said than done, however. For some reason we had to wear pith helmets that simply refused to adjust to our way of life at all. Mother had made washable covers that looked clean, at least on Sundays. But at the first tumble, the brims broke and thereafter dangled about our faces. The helmets would fall from the nails Papa had dedicated to their use, or crouch on the benches under the table waiting, just *waiting* to be crushed like martyrs embracing the inevitable. I'm sure the saying "at the drop of a hat" must have originated in China.

"Why can't we go bareheaded like the Chinese?" Ralph asked after his helmet had been retrieved the second time from the murky waters of the canal.

"You'd die of sunstroke. This isn't the same kind of sunshine that we had at home in North Carolina," Papa said.

"It's the same sun, isn't it?"

"Remember the Shunammite's son," Mother said grimly, and we had visions of being carried in to die with no help from our prophet if we disobeyed him.

Shanghai itself was a city filled with wonders for us. Only Celia could remember having seen great piles of masonry called buildings and the bustling traffic of a modern city. Like the Chinese, we were filled with awe at the sight of the fierce-looking Sikh policemen with their bronzed faces and hawklike features. Once, as we were being snatched along the Bund in a careening tram, we giggled hysterically to see a mahogany giant standing unperturbed in the center of traffic, adjusting a ridiculous topknot of hair and deliberately rewinding his turban. Somehow the Sikhs never seemed so frightening again.

While Mother was in the hospital, Papa took us to Whiteaway Laidlaw, Shanghai's leading department store, where we became personally acquainted with the Mad Hatter himself.

"Put the old hats in a bag, please," Papa said when we had all been fitted.

"You wish to keep *these?*" the salesman asked, holding Ralph's battered gear by two fastidious fingers.

"And why not?" Papa countered.

Back in our houseboat home again, Papa told Celia to sew Mother's pearl ring securely in the lining of his coat. Unable to keep it at the hospital, Mother had wanted to run no risk of losing her treasured engagement ring.

That night, Papa woke to find Mary cold, wet, and uncovered. Groping about for her afghan, he discovered not only the afghan gone but his coat missing from the nail where it had hung beside the tiny porthole. Some ingenious thief had inserted a long hook and made off with all he could fish from the Herrings. Papa's chagrin was vast. Was there no outwitting the thieves in China?

Papa was full of reminiscence about his former life in Shanghai. He took us all around to meet his former colleague, Dr. Bryan, and they talked at great length about mission procedures. But nothing seemed like China to us. We couldn't understand the chatter of the boatmen around us because they didn't speak our dialect. They ate rice instead of *mien-tiao*, the boiled noodles of the north. And on the streets there was something insulting about the pidgin English that was thrown at the Chinese at every turn. Our floating neighbors gazed at us constantly and kept their distance. Foreigners we undoubtedly were, but why were we living as natives? It was our first experience on the nether side of racial barriers. We had been "different" before, but not excluded.

When Susie developed dysentery, Papa called in a doctor from the French concession, who was connected with the Lunghai Railway.

He loomed in the narrow doorway, shutting out most of the light. "Seex children, all healthy and living like thees?" He was so huge that Papa looked frail beside him. He noted the bowl of rice gruel that Celia had prepared. "Ah, rice gruel! Fine theeng, fine theeng!" he said, and dipped into his satchel for medicine. "Thees for now, and thees you may need, and thees, and thees, and thees," he went on with kindling enthusiasm.

Standing astride the two bobbing boats, he waved off Papa's protestations, while we wondered what would happen should the boats suddenly part company. "Too many seeken here." He lifted palms upward and shrugged. "Mus' go back to France, mus' go back to England—no one stay veree long. We leeve too delly-kate," and he laughed till both boats trembled. "I theenk *le bon Dieu* mus' take care of you, *non?*"

That God did take care of us we all firmly believed, but He seemed to do it best in the now friendly atmosphere of the Chining home, and we all returned to it gratefully. Those who preferred the ports, with the electric lights and plumbing conveniences of which we heard a great deal but saw little, could have them and welcome. We could take them or leave them (mostly leave them) without regrets.

There was a pile of mail awaiting us. Mr. Blalock came over to share the news, his expression even more wistful than usual. We children had to give a semblance of respectful attention. News from America was a terrible bore.

"What do you make of this?" Mr. Blalock said, showing Papa a letter he'd received. "They simply don't see our position at all, Brother Herring. Everything's grown so big! Big buildings, big organizations, big debts! The bigger the better, apparently."

Papa read the letter, his face grim. The words themselves weren't cruel. Certainly they weren't meant to be. "Highest esteem, noble self-denials . . . greater harmony. . . ." But enclosing a gift of three hundred dollars didn't soften the blow: Blalock's church was asking to be relieved of the responsibility for his support unless he would consent to rejoin the Southern Baptist work.

"Has there been any indication that they were tired of supporting you?" Papa asked.

"None whatever," Brother Blalock said. "I looked carefully for any sign of that while I was in North Carolina. It's just the result of that pressure toward conformity!"

Papa stroked his moustache thoughtfully. "That's what comes of making big issues of belonging to an organization." He cleared his throat. "Actually, that's what we've done, too."

Brother Blalock shook his finger solemnly. "In my baccalaureate sermon, Dr. White of Richmond spoke on the subject, 'Espouse a Weak Cause When It's a Righteous One.' Then, when he learned that I was going with the Gospel Mission, he put his arms around me and pleaded with me not to go that way."

"The trouble with you Baptists," Mother said, her smile softening her criticism somewhat, "is that you think in terms of the absolute. Absolute black, absolute white; and there's no such thing in nature. With most of those people, you are either an absolute Southern Baptist or perilously close to being an absolute blackguard."

"But our cause *is* absolutely right!" Papa said. "You said that when you married into it."

"And I say so now. But that doesn't mean that our methods have always been absolutely right. You can do God's will in your own very imperfect way, as Moses found out to his sorrow when he buried the Egyptian."

Neither of the men, though seminary graduates, had ever applied the Bible so practically, and they were silent.

The fact that there was undeniable dissention in the ranks of the Gospel Mission gave further cogency to her remarks.

We were getting restive.

"Can't we go out to play now?" Ralph asked.

"What's the matter with you chil'ren? Aren't you even interested in letters from home?"

They didn't seem like letters from "home" to us, but who were we to argue? Papa opened a letter from Aunt Mollie.

> Claude and I attended the Association at Shiloh Church. So many asked about you. Brother Hocutt was there with all the children. They named their youngest Manly, after your dear boy, and it will be a wonder if he is not spoiled with so many sisters. But you never saw a nicer behaved bunch of children.

Here Alec exploded in a giggle and Papa looked over his glasses in disapproval—missing, as usual, the mark in assessing blame between Ralph and Alec. Ralph had been mouthing nonsense and pantomiming a parental slap on the wrist. The boys' expressions sobered instantly.

Papa resumed his reading.

> One of his church members told me that for the last six months Brother Hocutt has been making up out of his own salary any lack in the offerings for you, their missionary. You know how industrious he is, farming as well as preaching. I could wish our erstwhile pastor had some of the same virtues. He still ignores the debts he left and is apparently beginning again the same story in Moore's Creek. However, that didn't queer him with the "powers-that-be," for he was given a prominent place on the program, while they didn't even ask

Brother H. to lead in prayer. If the brethren in Raleigh *must* discipline us, why don't they work on the *real* vices?

For several days Papa went about his work with a quietness that was unusual for him. We recognized the tuneless whistle of "Hold the Fort for I Am Coming" and knew he was having a bout with the Apollyon of discouragement.

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" Mother challenged him one evening, planting Mary in his lap and a kiss on his nose with special tenderness.

"But I *am* hoping in God," he said defensively and began bouncing Mary to *"Chee-mo, chee-mo,"* the "Ride-a-cock-horse" of the Shanghai dialect. "What gets me," he blurted finally, "is Hocutt giving that money out of his own pocket. With all those chil'ren he can't afford that!"

"He's doing it as unto the Lord, and the Lord will see to it that he doesn't lack," Mother said gently.

"Just the same, I don't like these pressures!"

At the next mission meeting, Papa made known his decision. "I've made up my mind," he told his fellows. "I don't expect you to agree with me, but whether you do or not, I must realign myself with my brothers, the Southern Baptists."

It really was no surprise to Mrs. Crawford. She raised her eyebrows. "How can you expect the folks at home to hold out for the principles if you desert them?"

"That's just it. The folks at home are not going to buck the denomination."

"Not without a leader. It was your stand that influenced many of these younger missionaries. The greater the opposition, the greater the respect you've earned."

Papa was touched by the expression of faith. "But Baptists have no leader but Christ."

"Theoretically," Mr. Blalock put in. "Practically, it's a different matter. Do you think my church at home would have abandoned me unless someone from outside had been leading in another direction?"

Papa shook his head. "I talked things over with Lawton and Sallee. There has been very little subsidization there. If I go, they promise me the greatest liberty. There must be some way we can work without either compromise or divisiveness. The only thing that bothers me is that so few will understand my change of position. As Alice says, loyalties look so cut and dried to the folks back home."

"Mark my words, Brother Herring. When power becomes entrenched, it takes a David or a Luther," Mrs. Crawford said solemnly.

"Perhaps you're right," Papa said. "Perhaps you're right. It looked so to me for a while." Then he grinned. "But I'm just not *that* kind of David, I guess."

CHAPTER 18

Return To The Fold

In early September, a letter arrived from the Board in Richmond. It concluded:

> We are delighted to reinstate you as one of our missionaries. While we have had our differences in the past, we have always felt that you were a man of unquestioned principle and integrity. From what we hear, Mrs. Herring, too, will be a great help to our cause. May the blessing of the Lord rest upon your labors in the new field.

One of the first things Papa did thereafter was to call in his favorite barber. The old fellow had been proud of his tonsorial efforts. Especially did he like the gleaming, high forehead, shaved to a fine line at the very crest of Papa's well-shaped head. As for the long black moustache that was now beginning to show dignified streaks of grey—well, you just didn't see hirsute marvels like that often in China.

"Senior-teacher will never look so well again," he mourned.

"Men in my country don't wear queues," Papa explained.

"So they never know the dignity a queue bestows, honorable sir. *You* have known it!" He spread his hands in a gesture of futility. "You want me to shave the moustache, too?"

"Oh, no."

The barber picked up the razor and tested it carefully against his palm. Orders were orders. Lugubriously he wrung out steaming towels and laid them across the patriarchal brow.

"Better save it against the inroads of baldness, Papa," Gordon suggested, grinning.

"Let's call this a holiday!" Celia proposed.

It was much easier to wangle a holiday from Papa than from Mother. She was in favor of Guy Fawkes' Day and the Queen's Birthday, but she thought America made too much of her dead heroes, what with celebrations for George Washington, Lincoln, and Robert E. Lee. Wasn't a birthday celebration for the country enough?

"I'll get some firecrackers," Ralph suggested hopefully.

"You'll get yourselves a paddling!" Papa replied, but he didn't sound as if he meant it, and since nothing more was said about lessons, the Fifteenth of September passed into history as a red-letter day, ranking nonchalantly with the Fourth of July and Guy Fawkes' Day.

That was the way with Papa's mock heroics. He'd shed his queue and a whole way of life as blithely as if he'd been flinging a halo toward a hatrack. We gathered that whether it ringed a peg or not was a matter of small moment. Keeping himself flexible had been the important thing. Besides, who could tell? Perhaps Papa had been as uncomfortable with his queue as we had been with our pith helmets. If so, this really *was* a good time to celebrate.

The exodus from Shantung to Honan was again by wheelbarrow caravan, but it wound up in cindery triumph with a couple of hours in a third-class carriage of the *chemin-de-fer* from Kaifeng to Chengchow. We sat like the Chinese, perched on our baggage in the crowded aisles. When the conductors appeared, we had grandstand seats to watch the confusion. There was a great chatter about who belonged on the train and who didn't. And it took no less than five officers at a time, one to translate Chinese to French, another to translate French to Chinese or English, a third to carry out orders and wave a billy around impressively, and two to wear the braid.

The entire Lawton family was at the station to meet us. It seemed positively fantastic that they could have known within a three-hour period just when to expect us. They had five children, four red-headed, to our six, less colorfully maned. Only Celia was without a partner to pal or feud with, as the case might warrant. They giggled delightedly at everything Gordon and Ralph said, and of course the boys obliged with plenty of nonsense. All in all, things were looking up for the Herrings.

Mr. Lawton was small and brisk and amiable. He hailed from the Palmetto State. Mrs. Lawton had brought additional virtues from her home in industrious Pennsylvania. She was small and brisk and amiable and determined. But we learned about all that later. Mr. Lawton pointed toward a large three-storied brick house within a walled compound situated about halfway between the railway station and the old city wall. "That's to be your home," he said. "Mr. Sallee is going to start work in Kaifeng if he can get a place to live there, and you're to have his house. There's ours, yonder, just outside the city wall. You're to stay with us tonight, you know."

We had been walking along an old road, worn by centuries of traffic and winds into a deep gully, which ran to the rear of our compound and on toward the Yellow River and Peking. The stubble of last summer's cotton dotted the fields to either side of the road. Three youths, using long-handled wooden pliers, pulled the stubble, roots and all, to be used as fuel. Flocks of crows darkened the sky at intervals as they made their noisy way to the roosts in the gatehouses of the city beyond us.

"We leave the road here," Mr. Lawton said. As we clambered up the bank, we noticed a string of mangy-looking camels beyond a bend that had hidden them from view. Their heads nodded just above the level of the cotton field.

"From the Gobi Desert?" Papa asked incredulously.

Mr. Lawton nodded. "We don't see them often now, but we get the dust!"

"Oh, boy! We'll be living in the country!" Ralph said. Ahead of us the old city wall loomed behind the Lawton compound.

Mr. Lawton laughed. "We had open house for our neighbors for two weeks, just to satisfy their curiosity. Three thousand people streamed through our home in one day!"

"Will *we* have to do that?" Mother asked, dismayed at the very thought.

"I don't see why we should," Papa said.

The following day we all ran across the intervening fields to appraise our new home. The Lawtons were as excited as we were. Our home was larger than anything we'd ever seen. It even had a central heating system. Papa decided immediately that such luxury was not for us, however, and our spirits fell slightly. Around the front ran a large porch with a high wall in lieu of wooden railings. Nobody ever had railings of wood unless he was rich; China had been too long denuded of her forests. At Mother's insistence this wall was later brought down to half its forbidding height, but even so, it retained the heat in summer and blocked the view from our windows the year round.

A curving staircase, part of it ideal for slithering descents, ran to the second floor from the spacious front hall.

"Oh, no you don't!" Mother said to the boys, who shrugged in faked innocence. The Lawtons laughed.

"This'll be my study," Papa said of the room most easily accessible to visitors.

"No fireplace. You'll freeze," Mother warned.

"I'm no hothouse plant!" Papa scoffed.

The living and dining rooms on opposite sides of the hall were of generous proportions. A smaller room between the living room and the back entry later evolved into a dining area less formidable to heat.

Mother headed toward the kitchen. "A butler's pantry, no less! Only, who's going to train the butler?"

Upstairs were four large bedrooms and a room for bathing—innocent of any plumbing, however. Papa soon installed a galvanized iron tub and had it mounted on a brick platform and drained by means of a bamboo tube. To insure good drainage, it was raised at one end, which made the whole thing look dreadfully like one of the native bricked-up sepulchres. Every Saturday night the cowman toiled up the back stairs hoisting twin buckets of hot water for our ablutions. Gordon called him "the knight of the bawth."

The attic was the most fabulous part of the house. It wasn't completely floored, and on occasion one or another of us would miss a footing and step through the ceiling below with interesting repercussions from Papa. A balcony opened westward far above the tops of newly-planted trees. Here we could play dolls or read, out of reach of Mother's calls to domestic duties. In our imaginations, there was something of the aroma of Juliet about the parapet, though any Romeo would clearly have broken his neck trying to further his romance there.

The yard was filled with rubble when we first viewed it, but Papa soon had shade trees planted and a small, depressed corner of the yard designated hopefully as an orchard. But because he wouldn't imbed bits of broken glass in the walls, we never got to taste the fruit. He seemed to feel that, since the Bible allowed for gleaners in Palestine, he should do the same for hungry passers-by in China.

There was room in the back yard for the servants' quarters and a stable still further to the rear, where the cowman slept above the kine. Every summer the garden behind the wall was Papa's pride and joy. Oh, it was a wonderful home to us, though ill-fitting windows rattled ominously in every storm and allowed the dust to sift in piles on the sills. The bare floors echoed with our tread, but they were better than earthen floors any day. What better home could any missionary family ask for?

Some three decades later the house became a target for Japanese bombs that reduced the back part to rubble. We were glad to have been spared the sight. Now, our memories retain only gratitude for that which was indestructible about our heritage.

How Papa did love to preach! He was charmed with the little chapel just inside the west gate of the city. Here again was the long blue curtain dividing male from female. Here also were throngs being drawn by curiosity to see what wares these foreigners brought. Sunday morning differed not at all for most of the Chinese from any other morning; but it did for us, and we understood our role in setting an example.

Mother took her place at the organ, her feet incased in arctics against the bone-chilling cold. Mrs. Lawton stood at the door in an effort to guide the loiterers toward a semblance of worship. Mr. Lawton was holding the fort in Kwo Tien, a newly-opened center. The Lawton children lined up on a bench halfway down the length of the small chapel, on the women's side. The minor Herrings—all six of us—sat around the rostrum at Papa's feet. We had an excellent view of everybody except of Papa towering behind us.

The first Sunday morning we were so assembled, we realized that something was bothering him. Several times he passed his hand over his thinning locks. His head was cold. That was the trouble. He missed the queue and black silk cap so perfectly appropriate anywhere for the Chinese gentleman. His predicament was understandable. We hadn't gotten used to the stiff-billed tweed cap with its wide circumference either. It had been advertised by Whiteaway Laidlaw as the smartest headgear for the well-dressed Englishman. It looked like something the Mad Hatter himself had dreamed up. And of course no well-dressed Englishman ever wore a cap in church.

Mother frowned at our rubbernecking and began to pump the organ.

On the front seat a woman pulled peanuts from her cuffs and gave them to her children. A small pile of shells grew at their feet. We must have been watching the little drama a bit too intently. The woman laughed gaily and tottered across on tightly bound feet to share her refreshments with us. We shot a glance at Mother. Of course you thanked the lady, but what then?

But Mother was having some kind of paroxysm of her own. Her face was flushed, and she seemed to be struggling against laughter. *Mother?* Incredible! Even the baby organ puffed and snorted.

Papa had announced a hymn and was explaining the procedure. Above the confusion his voice carried authority. The crowd was subsiding perceptibly. We looked up at him and saw why Mother was convulsed. Trust Papa. He'd solved his problem with his own compromise between East and West. There he stood, his cap turned bill-side rearward. What did it matter how he looked from behind? That was only Satan's view, after all.

One of the first problems to face us in Chengchow was to get ourselves adopted by the right kind of *da tze-fu* (cook). You couldn't get a man too smart, or he'd steal you out of house and home. And all the others were terribly hard to train. Papa thought it would be well to break in a man from the country. Then you could keep on hiring his kin from the same village, and the cook would be forever responsible for their behavior.

After a few abortive attempts we found ourselves taken in charge by Chen Tze-fu. He came from a village about ten miles away. Once when we made a call there, the whole clan turned out to welcome us as if we were long-lost relatives. Every cousin there knew our names, ages, and tastes. We had the uneasy feeling that whatever we might have spoken in our chambers had been broadcast there from the roof tops. But so long as Chen Tze-fu's interests were thoroughly bound with ours, we had nothing to fear.

Mother never succeeded in getting him to keep things as clean as she'd have liked nor to stop spraying the laundry with a fine mist from his mouth, but he *could* bake the best roast lamb and bread and cookies!

He, too, had his trials. Papa *would* order sweet potatoes, even though Chen Tze-fu insisted that they were only for our social inferiors. Buying them on the market made him lose much face. He pretended to a violent disgust when the cookies he'd baked in the morning were gone before night. He'd bang the rolling pin on the table and stamp around in high dudgeon, so, for the most part, we stayed clear of the kitchen.

Chen Tze-fu and the boys derived much merriment from the foibles of the missionaries. They laughed loud and longest over the orders one lady had given her cook. Instead of telling him to kill a chicken, *sha gee-tze*, she'd told him to kill his wife, *sha chee-tze*. And when the fellow stared in amazement, she'd demonstrated with the gesture of a knife being drawn across her throat. Chen Tze-fu capered about the room bent double with laughter.

We knew all the names with which our elders were dubbed by the natives. There was *Dwei Me'rh*, or Mr. Two-gates, who could travel in two directions at once. There was *Pa-chien Pa-hou* (Miss Fearful, fore-and-aft), who was afraid of her own shadow. Papa was *Quai-quai-di-Hai*, or Hurry-up Herring. He probably earned that title the day he mashed his toenail showing how the piano *could* be moved, if only the coolies would make a proper attempt.

The problem of our schooling was shared jointly with the Lawtons. It was agreed that a governess should be employed, who, to be perfectly fair to all concerned, should live one month with the Lawtons and one with the Herrings. It's a wonder her personality didn't split asunder after the first two months: there was Miss Goddard, all of twenty years old, shuttling between nationalities with no Declaration of Independence to protect her. If she majored on events subsequent to 1492, Mother was likely to remind us dryly that the world had rocked along for quite a while before Columbus' famous discovery. If she spent too much time on the chronology of English kings, Mrs. Lawton was for mustering up the shades of Paul Revere.

Our textbooks came from the United States, via Montgomery Ward. In that choice, Mother was outvoted three to one. She opened one book after another and closed it with a bang. "It's a wonder they don't say that the Theorem of Pythagoras was passed by the Continental Congress! Haven't they even *heard* of the Magna Charta? Why, in Australia we knew *all* the chief cities of the world, not just those of our own country."

"Yeah," Papa teased. "And you said it, 'Washington-on-the-Pot′omac,' didn't you?"

"That's no worse than London on the *Th*ames," Mother retorted.

Our schoolroom was on the first floor of a large house built in honor of Mr. Lawton's parents and called "The Memorial." It was halfway between our respective homes. Here the single ladies lived upstairs, guarded by a gatekeeper, his wife, and their dog—a surly creature, underfed and vicious. We hit upon the plan of throwing stones for him to chase while we darted in or out of the schoolroom. Papa warned the woman to keep her dog tied, but she paid no attention. Celia thought we were being too concerned with a mere nuisance.

"He won't hurt you, really, if he knows you're not afraid of him," she said. But she didn't know dog psychology so well after all. One morning when she scorned to throw the stone, he charged her and gashed two deep holes in her wrist, almost severing a tendon.

Papa loaded his rifle and shot the dog.

"How would you like someone to shoot your Rover?" one of the missionaries asked virtuously.

"Don't overwork your imagination," Papa said. "If that woman had loved her dog as devotedly as she would have you believe, she'd have fed him more than starvation rations." The sum he paid in damages proved ample to stop her wails and heal her broken heart.

The schooling we received in The Memorial was our first real experience in a competitive world. Sibling rivalries were forgotten in favor of more interesting interfamily squabbles. The smaller the issue, the greater the rallying of forces. While the Lawtons sang "Glow-ree, Glow-ree, hallelujah!" with true Southern resonance, we yelled "Glorry, Glorry, hallelujah!" right back. For some reason, forgotten now, we felt it our duty to counteract the more frugal tendencies of our friends. Whenever a Herring passed the old potbellied stove, no matter how warm the room, he'd kick open the draft, only to be followed by a Lawton, who made excuse equally furtive to walk by and kick it shut again. Really it's a wonder Miss Goddard and the stove didn't go schizophrenic together.

But how we loved those Lawtons! Always after school we were begging to go over and play with them. Mother's method of keeping us at home was to quote Scripture. There was something depressingly effective about her quotes: *Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee.* Most of the time we'd just decide to leave our feet at home.

But Mrs. Lawton's method was even more effective. She found that setting her youngsters at chores in which we could share or not as we pleased kept us from too much fraternization. It was no fun to rake leaves for a couple of hours before playing thirty minutes, or to watch while our playmates dutifully accomplished the task. We usually drifted back to our books and piano at home.

The piano had added immeasurably to our enjoyment of life. It was a gift from Grandfather Rea. Of a rich curly-grained wood, warmer than mahogany, it had triple brass candelabra fastened left and right. Only, the ivory key tops wouldn't stay glued in place, so that it grinned at us with a snaggle-toothed friendliness. Periodically Mother wrenched the innards to greater sonic accuracy, after which her enjoyment of this member of the family was measurably heightened. It was the only time we ever saw a tool in her hand. The rest of the house could await Papa's convenience, but this was her domain. Every day at prayers she would play while we sang as many hymns as we chose. And at night she'd practice her Beethoven sonatas and Chopin.

She and Papa were united in a desire to develop our talents. Papa sent to Montgomery Ward for a flute and two violins. Celia and Gordon took readily to the violin, but it was only after months of futile effort that Ralph suddenly found he could breathe notes from his flute. Soon Mother had a budding orchestra on her hands. The good old piano bore the brunt of the struggle for harmony and carried certain scars till the fatal day when Japanese soldiers quartered horses in our home and chopped our friend up for firewood. One notable scar was the deep hole gouged by the piccolo (successor to the flute) just above the right candelabrum. Susie had been practicing the piano. Ralph thought it time for her to stop and threw the piccolo at her. Fortunately for her, if not for the piano, Susie ducked. That was one time Mother failed to punish the youngsters. They were too aghast at what they'd done.

In many ways China was kind to us. She allowed us plenty of time. Whether or not we took advantage of its slow passage was strictly up to us. There was no forcing of our growth into precocity. Moons waxed and waned deliberately during the long fall and winter seasons. At night Mother practiced her Beethoven and Bach while the wind rattled the shutters of our bedroom windows.

And somewhere along the way an awareness settled deep within us that none of us could have explained. We knew that, in spite of its sluggish pace, time was really our friend.

We shall always be grateful that Papa was granted every one of his fourscore and one years, most of them in China. The isolation of the mission field, as opposed to the community-conscious West, allowed him to grow with an angularity like that of a wind-swept *ming* tree. He could never be just one in a forest of trees—all alike. Although he was fifty years old when he made the move to Chengchow, he was entering a zestful period marked with the stamp not so much of time as of eternity.

"Don't you get discouraged sometimes, Brother Herring?" a short-termer asked him, once. "Wouldn't it be better policy if, instead of rescuing the perishing, we'd concentrate on putting out the fire itself?"

"What do you mean, putting out the fire?" Papa had just returned, bone-tired and starving for the companionship of his loved ones, from Mi Hsien, the most inaccessible of the outstations for which he felt responsible.

We knew he'd welcomed that very inaccessibility. Why? Simply because he could work there without fear of interference by sentimentalists. The seed could be given time to sprout and take root before impatient reformers would bother to move in and assume control.

There was something irritatingly glib about this particular questioner. He was well armed with data on the points most often discussed abroad, where there was little knowledge of local mores and less interest in Chinese points of view. The answers he fully expected were already catalogued and firmly settled in his mind. You could see him fitting his notes into a neat little pattern which would be carried back to the States to render the cause of missions even more boring than it already was to the growing cynicism of America.

Papa had to ask his question again. "Put out what fire?"

"Oh, the ignorance of the masses, the antiquated marriage customs, the abominable squeeze—all that sort of thing. Why don't we just institute social reforms? You know what I mean." He waved his hand vaguely.

"No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you," Papa said. He indulged in Biblical quotes rarely enough to give spice to his words. "But in the name of common sense, why didn't the Founder do it that way if that's the best way to propagate Christianity?"

About some of the social reforms he'd seen attempted, Papa had serious doubts. A bright Chinese boy had been singled out for favor and sent to America for higher education. Left behind was his betrothed, a simple country girl with what had been a similar background. But soon he was writing to break the engagement, and the girl, unable to stand the implied disgrace, committed suicide.

"That's what comes of Americanizing instead of just Christianizing the Chinese," Papa said. "I'm saying nothing about what's going on at Mi Hsien. Sure as shootin', some of my esteemed colleagues would lure the most encouraging converts into areas they feel to be so much more important. *I* say, let 'em be."

CHAPTER 19

Treasure
In
Earthen
Vessels

*W*e had been in Chengchow two years when word came from Australia that Grandfather Rea was about to die. He kept asking for Alice. Grandmother had died the year Susie was born.

"You take Mary with you and I'll look after the others, here," Papa said. "It's been ten years since you were home and you deserve a furlough."

We had just finished family prayers, and Mother was brushing Mary's dark hair around her finger into long ringlets. She turned the three-year-old a small arc to the right and began on another curl.

Mother could seldom bask in the luxury of an uninterrupted conversation with Papa. She seldom basked, period. For one thing, her conscience wouldn't let her, and for another, the world was too much with us. The canary, perhaps inspired by our recent hymn-singing, was full-throated with praises of his own. The boys were breaking the circular symmetry of the chairs into patterns more secular than devotional. (The chairs were beginning to show their age and protested creakily.) Long pongee curtains rippled in a chilly current of air through the window frames, the rods of burnt bamboo seeming overly stout for the frail substance and color of the hangings. (Native materials were less expensive than curtains or curtain rods from Montgomery Ward.)

Mother shivered. "Gordon, put some coal on the fire." "Susie, fetch me my shawl from upstairs. That's a good girl!"

Returning with the shawl, Susie sat on a hassock, her chin in her hands, and gazed enviously at Mary. Susie's hair was cut short like a boy's. She supposed that, if her hair had been dark like the other girls', she could have claimed more of Mother's attention. Yang Sao (the current amah) thought blonde hair a definite liability.

Mother's expression was faintly distraught. She combed out a curl and brushed it in again, bouncing it on her hand thoughtfully. How could one know if a furlough was deserved? Where lay duty? With her sick father, or her children? Papa's encouragement was useless unless it forwarded God's purpose. And who could tell what *that* was for the moment? Would Father Rea live till she got to Sydney? (Sometimes Mother's God bore a striking resemblance to the one of the Old Testament, unrelieved by the fatherly gentleness of the New. He seemed to overshadow Mother and make her even sterner with herself than with us.)

She shook her head. "I'm not going to leave you and the children. Why can't we take our furlough to Australia this time?"

"I'm asking for no furlough until I've been with the

Board at least seven years," Papa said. "But they can't raise any objection to *your* going. After all, the mission has been put to no expense in getting you to the field. No, we'll be all right here. Don't I take care of the chil'ren at night, anyway?"

"*They* may be all right, but what about *you?* Next time you might really break your neck!"

Papa grinned and glanced at Susie. She had good reason to remember the incident referred to. It had to do with the beginnings of our summer cottage on Ki Kung Shan, earlier in the year. Ki Kung Shan was the mountain rendezvous for missionaries in the southern part of the province.

That spring, before we were really due to go to the mountains, Gordon and Ralph had come down with some kind of fever that looked as if it might be contagious. After consultation and prayer, our parents decided to separate the family temporarily. Mother, Gordon, and Ralph would stay in Chengchow until the boys were well enough to travel. Papa would take the rest of us ahead to Ki Kung Shan, where he could rush the cottage to completion. Celia was well able to look after the smaller children. Everything would work out fine.

We didn't enjoy crowding in on another mission family, but Celia said it was a matter of tit for tat. People had done it to us, often enough. All had gone well until Papa was ready to put rafters across the stone walls. One night he came back to our quarters, visibly shaken.

"You came within an inch of losing your Papa today," he said. Perched high on the rooftree, he'd lost his footing and, but for a quick grasp of the rafter, would probably have landed headfirst on the jagged rocks below. "That was just about the closest call I've had!" he repeated more than once during the evening meal.

We begged to go with him the next day to share in the excitement. "No," he ordered. "You'll just get in the way. You can come to meet me toward evening. Susie, you write to your mother. I can't take the time, and she'll think something's wrong if she doesn't hear from us every day."

Susie sat down, licked the point of her lead pencil, and wrote to Mother. It was quite a respectable letter. Mother always told us that putting in the details was what made letters interesting. Susie and Alec danced down the hill to the community post office in plenty of time to catch the coolie who delivered mail on the mountain and met the trains in Sien Tien.

Three days later Mother showed up at Sien Tien with two very pale boys. "How is Hai First-born?" she asked the postman as soon as her feet touched the cindery platform.

He shrugged his shoulders. How should he know?

She hired three sedan chairs, wasting no time on dickering.

"Has a foreigner died on the mountain recently?" she asked the chair-bearers. They shook their heads blankly. Unless these foreigners were talking about money, their words were unintelligible.

Mother urged the bearers up the mountain. She wouldn't even let them pause at the halfway station.

Not until the three chairs swooped down into the shadow of the new home could she believe less than the very worst.

She scrambled over the shafts of her conveyance. "Oh, David! You're—you're all *right?*"

With one amazed gasp, Papa dropped the hammer and opened his arms. "What in the world did you write, Susie?" he asked, grinning over Mother's shoulder.

Susie tossed her head. "I just said you'd fallen and nearly killed yourself!" she said airily. "Isn't that what happened?"

"I *nearly* fell," Papa said, "and *might* have been killed!"

Mother closed her eyes and shook her head, "All that nightmare because of a misplaced adverb," she groaned.

For days Susie floated two feet off the ground on a cloud of her own making. Just think what a few written words had accomplished! Perhaps she had a gift, like Gordon with his violin. Only she'd better keep it hidden. If Ralph and Gordon discovered her secret there'd be no more living with them, ever. She thought about the talent wrapped in a napkin and buried. Perhaps the man in the parable had brothers, too. Poor fellow! It began to seem as if the Lord had been too harsh.

At dinner the second day, her dream had been rudely shattered. Mother told her to stop toying with her food or she'd have to take castor oil. Being bilious was the way the boys had come down with their fevers.

Susie sighed. It wasn't even her lot to be interestingly pale and wan.

Now, a half-year later, things were no better. The decision about Mother's going to Australia still hung in mid-air. Susie had a hopeful moment when Mother said she could easily manage the three youngest ones. But Papa vetoed that. Susie and Alec would take half fare. Out of the question. Papa's impatience was beginning to show. "Do you take me for a nincompoop? I can han'le the family. Just you get yourself ready!"

Ralph whispered to Alec that he'd been getting tired of petticoat government, anyway. Alec giggled. We could trust Alec to respond to our wit and bear no tales.

We were all asleep the cold January night that Papa took Mother and Mary to catch the midnight train to the south. Breakfast the next morning was echoingly quiet. Not that Mother and Mary had been noisy. It was just that nobody could think of anything to say to cheer Papa.

"You know what that child said?" he asked us.

For his sake we feigned interest.

"She reached over and patted my cheek and said, 'I'll be back, Papa. I'll be back, you wait and see!' " Papa blew his nose vigorously. "I'll declare that's the sweetest baby a body ever had!"

It was plain to see that Papa needed us. At prayers, Alec sat in Papa's lap. He seemed to enjoy these extra innings of babyhood. After all, he'd been the baby only eighteen months.

The servants made gestures toward keeping their usual routines, but dust lay undisturbed in the corners. At first we thought it fun to hole up with a book and not be called to polish silver or anything, but the joys of haphazard living were already beginning to pall when

Mother's first letter arrived. It had been mailed in Hongkong.

Dear David,

If I could, I'd have turned around and come home last night. Through my porthole I heard two ladies on deck talking. One said to the other in shocked tones, "Did you know there is a lady on board who has left *five* children and her husband in the heart of China?" Oh, David, what have I done?

What Mother had done—albeit inadvertently—was to point up Papa's natural limitations. With that sixth sense which children seem to have, we detected a strong odor of condescension at the Sunday afternoon services for the missionaries of the station, and we resented it. Especially on the part of our Free Methodist friends. (They seemed anything but Free to us.) The meetings were always held in the Lawton living room.

"Poor motherless boy!" Mrs. Fountain said as we rose creakily from our knees following the final prayer. She stroked Ralph's unruly hair. "Wouldn't you like to come over and have dinner with us tomorrow night?"

Ralph wouldn't, but he couldn't say so. The next afternoon we speeded him on his way to high society with a few well-chosen taunts. (It was our duty to see that he got no notions of being superior to the uninvited members of the family.) He looked hungrily at the lamb roast that Chen Tze-fu was basting in the large coal oven. Would the Fountain table yield anything better? Celia slicked his hair down with a wet brush. She always tried to stand as tall as her thirteen years would allow.

A half hour later he was back, grinning sheepishly, a fresh-baked loaf of bread under his arm. Mrs. Fountain had forgotten her casual invitation. She thought it quite opportune that he'd happened along, and would he take the bread back to the family? She was sure we could use some of her *really* good bread.

If Papa sensed anything to resent in the solicitude of his colleagues, we didn't know it. He was all in favor of every tub's standing on its own bottom. That way, another's opinion of his merits—whether as parent or missionary—wouldn't prove upsetting. What others did or failed to do was of small concern to Papa. He had enough to do, just minding his own business.

But when it came to commanding respect from the Chinese, Papa thought different tactics were required. Chinese were like children in that they'd eye a newcomer and push him around a bit just to see how much spunk he had. Nothing was gained by turning the other cheek in those circumstances.

Once we went with Papa to take a parting guest to the train. On the way home we passed the telegraph station, where loafers picked up a smattering of pidgin English and smart aleck ways of needling foreigners. Papa successfully ignored the jibes until a gangling fellow in the rear of the crowd set up the taunt in Chinese. "Foreign devils! Foreign devils!" There was no doubt about Papa's catching the significance of *that* phrase.

"I'll teach you—" Papa sliced his way through the crowd. The youth, shocked, darted toward the fields in the background. The crowd gaped. Papa was gaining on the lout, when suddenly he slipped and fell sprawling in mud. The crowd roared.

Papa drew himself up with what dignity he could muster, brushed off his trousers, and muttered to the men standing near. “If you don’t teach your children to show courtesy to your country’s guests, *who* will?” But we knew he’d lost face.

“What would you have done with him, if you’d caught him?” Ralph asked.

Papa glared. “I’d have shaken his teeth out!”

Word of the incident must have seeped through to the foreign community, for the following Sunday afternoon Mr. Fountain was ready with an unctious testimony. “I thank the Lord,” he said, beaming at Papa, “I thank the Lord that I’ve had the victory for some time now, Brother Herring. Ever since I was wholly sanctified, two years ago last fall, to be exact.”

“You mean you’ve never *once* lost your temper in all that time?”

Brother Fountain nodded benevolently. “What the Lord has done for me, He can do for you, too, Brother Herring.”

Put on that basis, the argument had to stand. Papa stroked his moustache. “Tell you what, Brother Fountain. If you can build that house on Ki Kung Shan this summer and not lose your temper—not once, mind—well, I’ll be inclined to investigate your claim. Fair enough?”

On the way home, Gordon spluttered indignantly. “Who does he think he is, anyway?”

Celia frowned. She knew that Mother would have been shocked at the whole thing. Mother was very sensitive to public opinion.

But Papa swung his cane jauntily. “Oh, he’ll get his comeuppance. Virtues put on display get shopworn like anything else. He'll find out he's made of clay just like the rest of us. I know what it's like to build a house with native help."

Despite the loss of face at the station, Papa seemed to draw fewer taunts thereafter. Perhaps the Chinese decided there was nothing either foreign about losing one's temper or devilish about taking a tumble, after all.

March brought in the wonderful kite-flying season. The pastime was no child's play in China. How best to meet the wind's angle of attack was something we argued about among ourselves. We each had a homemade spindle on which we hoarded all the string we could lay our hands on. Kites of every description leaned against the dining room wall. They seemed to share our eagerness to be air-borne as soon as we were released from our lessons.

Papa always left a small drawer in his desk cluttered with coins, old letters, beeswax, and assorted trivia. There we could find the copper coins to pay for our kites. (Once we overheard Mother chiding Papa about his casual largess. "That's simply no way to teach children the value of money!" she said. But Papa said we had to learn the value of sharing, too.) We became aware of a benign eye regarding the state of our small exchecquer. If ever we longed for a kite desperately enough to let our wants be known, day after day, after day, our faith in Papa's generosity was sure to be rewarded in much the same way as that of the manna-fed Israelites. He only wanted us to be sure we knew our own minds.

The kite-maker lived just inside the south gate of the city. We could scamper over the fields and make our choice of his supply, or watch while he made one to order. The process was fascinating. A wizened old gnome of a man, he fussed about the selection of the split bamboo and growled while trimming off the lumps. The bamboo wasn't as good here as it was in Soochow.

He didn't like to do things in a hurry. He squinted as his fingers slowly eased the frame into being, sometimes holding a stubborn section over the candle flame until it bent to his will. He smoothed rice paper gently across the frame, trimmed it carefully, and fastened it at last with cooked flour paste, which he kept in a folded cabbage leaf to conserve moisture.

Now it was time for the colors to blossom. Was the butterfly to have red or purple wings? The eyes, circled with bold strokes of the brush, were the same in any case. Finally the antennae were mounted, the kite finished. He looked us over unhappily. Did we have sense enough to know where to tie the lead strings? To know how long and heavy to make the tail? We always felt a little guilty over making him part with his latest love. But such was life.

The year of Mother's leave was memorable to us in that it was the only year we achieved the acquisition of a dragon kite. We didn't know there was any connection between the increase in our gleanings and the obvious truce in sibling rivalries brought on by our mutual yearnings. All we remembered was the tension of the moment when the boys, moving with deliberate speed through the oft-rehearsed preliminaries, finally raced across the field to lift our spangled beast skyward. Susie, because she was a girl, was granted only a few well-guarded moments at the helm. But she was satisfied. The achievement of holding our monster at bay lacked the scientific import of Benjamin Franklin's flirtation with lightning, but it afforded us a moment of wonder. What couldn't Franklin have done with a Chinese kite!

Mother's long journey across the equator and southward meant that, for weeks, Papa had no word from her. One day the long-awaited letter was among those that Tzu Niu handed to Papa, who was trimming the mulberry tree near the well. Papa gave a shout and we clustered about him, our newly-acquired family of ducklings forgotten. Celia and Gordon were tall enough to scan the beautiful symmetry of Mother's handwriting over Papa's shoulder. (Many people cherished Mother's letters. We children didn't come to know their worth for many years—not until we were again separated from her by an ocean.)

Papa sat down and leaned against the tree trunk, drawing Alec between his knees. The rest of us settled around him on the well mound. No one had to feign interest this time as he read the letter.

Dear Ones,

Here we are in Sydney—and in quarantine for two weeks to come! A case of smallpox developed on board, and no one's been allowed to leave the ship. "Auntie Ce" was on the dock to wave us a welcome yesterday when we anchored. It seems so sad to be so near and yet so far from her! She sent up a note to tell me what I feared from the first. Father passed away three days before I left Chengchow. They didn't cable me because they felt I needed the furlough. But over and over, I am assaulted by the question, *What doest thou here, Alice?* Surely I misread the Lord's will for me!

Papa's voice broke. He blew his nose and read on through the tender instructions for each of us. The letter ended with a description of Mary's winsomeness. When he had finished, we sat in silence. Papa scanned the pages again, drops forming on his cheeks and falling unnoticed on his shirt.

Finally he stood up and shook his head. "Sometimes I think the farther you are from home, the worse it is to be fatherless." He was speaking to himself—not us—and we knew he spoke from experience. "Perhaps it's better this way. Celia will do her good. Celia is so—so down-to-earth."

He walked down to the telegraph office to send a cable. Cables cost ten dollars a word and weren't sent lightly. This one had but three words. "Stay. Love. Mizpah." Mother would understand the reference to Genesis 31:49.

Usually, with the coming of June, Papa began preparations to take us to the mountains. Mother always wilted in the heat, and he felt obligated to make life as easy for her as possible. Having gotten us settled, he would then return to work in the sweltering heat of the plain, allowing only a few weeks in August for his own vacation. For himself he chose no pampering. And this year, *we* were getting none. Apparently he thought it time we toughened up a bit as he had in his youth.

All our talk of cool mountain springs and the joys of swimming failed to move him. His only concession was to rig up a rack for holding eight quarts of boiled water.

This we could lower on the windlass of the well, leave awhile, and pull up later for drinks five or six degrees cooler than the air about us. The air about us, incidentally, was as oppressed as we were: noises and smells seemed to swarm over the walls of our compound. Ralph's glee over living in the country had been short-lived. Now, two years after our arrival in Chengchow, we were surrounded by human and animal habitations of every lowly description.

The grass in the front yard, planted hopefully each fall, couldn't take the toughening process. It turned up its toes and died. The garden was a different matter. The garden must have tender loving care, though all else perish. Only Celia was exempt from the draft to the bucket brigade. Susie might have dodged the draft if she'd shown a tendency toward girl-type chores. But except for an initial repugnance for mud between her toes, she had to admit to a real enjoyment of the elements. According to the Bible, she and the soil had kinship, anyway. *Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.* She liked the musty flavor of the words. There was nothing in them to indicate that Eve's daughters were to strive for the "ladylike" behavior that Mother always insisted on. Susie wiggled her toe in front of an earthworm. Couldn't it be that the Lord *wanted* people to enjoy their lowly origin in view of their inevitable return?

One night Papa decided we'd all sleep outside: the house was like a huge brick oven. Noisy flocks of crows darkened the sky as they headed above us to their roosts in the gates of the city. We were equally busy. Celia and Gordon rigged up mosquito nets and Papa spaced our pallets at strategic intervals to forestall, if possible, any monkeyshines. Chen Tze-fu lugged water for the thirsty crew and retired to his quarters.

Papa padded barefoot across the yard with the water-jar rack. In the darkness he stepped on a scorpion. It stung him twice. He sagged and breathed a low, shuddering moan. If only he'd yelled, we'd have known he wasn't dying. As it was, we were frantic. He rocked agonizingly, mutely, to and fro. The sweat poured in streams down his torso. What to do? Dr. Louthan and the other foreigners were all away for the summer. Chen Tze-fu was sure the entrails of a fish would draw out the poison, but where to find a fish at such an hour? What would Mother have done? Did scorpions kill? Rover sat on his haunches and whined. We remembered reading about scorpions in the Bible, but there was no mention of an antidote.

When morning at last brought a measure of relief, Papa announced his decision. Going to Ki Kung Shan just might be the better part of valor after all.

Ralph breathed a deep sigh. The situation called for a word or two from the Bible. Mother would certainly have produced one. "If the Lord sent hornets to drive out the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, I guess He could use a scorpion on us, couldn't He?"

Papa's eyes twinkled wearily. He nodded. "Yeah! Powerful persuaders, scorpions!"

The trip to Ki Kung Shan involved an overnight stop at Tzu Ma Tien, a spot infamous in missionary history because of the vermin-infested inns. Again, Papa chose to sleep out of doors. This time he tied mosquito nets to the train windows and bedded us down on the platform, careful to investigate if creeping inhabitants might be trying to share our mattress. Politely, he invited the Chinese bystanders not to let us bother them. Just as politely, they continued to stare. Susie wondered sleepily what would happen if the train were to start in the night, dragging a sort of bridal veil to leeward. But things seldom got that far out of Papa's control.

When we piled out of the train at Sien Tien the next day, the scent of clear streams and bamboo forests made goosebumps flutter up our spines. We fidgeted while Papa hired coolies to carry the baggage and gave instructions to Chen Tze-fu about the cow. Then came the wild race for the halfway point.

A great stone gate in an ancient wall marked the midway resting place. Papa guessed the wall had been built long before the Tai Ping Rebellion. Moss-covered rocks lay in ragged disorder, following some dim outline across ridge and valley. The wall offered neither threat nor protection to anyone. Lizards sunned themselves placidly on its rough, taupe-colored stones. There was a profusion of wild roses and ferns. Azalea bushes, long since bloomed out, grew in large clumps. The greenish-brown fruit of the *yang tao* was nearly ripe. We filled our hats. Here we needed no headgear. Even the sun beamed benignly on Ki Kung.

Papa's spirits rose correspondingly as we toiled up the mountain. He began to quote Patrick Henry. Years before, at Wake Forest, he'd won an orator's medal for quoting Patrick Henry. We gave him no medal, but a grudging homage. How could we admit to trembly muscles in the face of all those histronics? The running fusillade of questions mounted to a fine frenzy of scorn. "But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week or the next year?" His voice hung on a high questioning note. "Shall we lie supinely on our backs till our enemy binds us hand and foot?" As if the picture of Papa's forebears lying prone with feet aloft wasn't ridiculous already, the rocks across the ravine echoed the last words mockingly . . . "hand and foot?" But by the time he reached the climax, the treasure of our heritage was becoming as hallowed to us as to Papa and Patrick Henry.

"Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!"

Even so, the ensuing hush was probably more breathless than reverent.

It was broken by the shouts of children in the swimming pool just out of sight behind a low stone wall. We quickened our pace. Across the way was the little chapel built by the Lutherans. Heavily shadowed by overhanging ginkgo trees, it had large panes of stained glass and a simple dignity of line that set it forever apart in our imaginations as the right kind of place to meet God. Neither then nor later could we detect disapproval of the frolicking that went on in plain view of Deity. But we weren't very observant in matters like that.

We passed the tennis courts and climbed steeply, turned south on the crest, then raced for the very last stone cottage, overhanging the east valley. Now we were in our element. Now, at last, we were home. No compound walls needed here!

The next day we saw that Mr. Fountain's house had risen in arched splendor from a new scar on the ridge across from the Cock's Comb. The Cock's Comb was the crest of rock from which the mountain got its name. But we didn't see Mr. Fountain until Sunday, after church. He made his way through the press of emerging worshipers to shake Papa's hand warmly.

"How's the work going, Brother Fountain?"

"Victory, Brother Herring, victory all the way," he purred.

Mr. McDougal of the Canadian Presbyterians was seized with a coughing fit. (We had it on good authority that Mr. McDougal had wagered two pounds of taffy on the outcome of Papa's challenge to this particular pilgrim's progress. The Presbyterians were noted for liberal tendencies. It was even reported that they approved of dancing—in America! But to place odds, two to one, on Apollyon! Whew! The Presbyterians must have had information about the enemy not known to the general public.)

Climbing the hill later, Papa got a blow-by-blow account from Mr. Bostick, younger brother of the friend of Gospel Mission days. No doubt about it, Brother Fountain had had his troubles. The workmen had malingered on the job; a whole keg of nails sent up from Hankow at great expense had been stolen; two boxes of glass for windows had been crushed by a disgruntled workman in a pique. The final perfidy was that of the head mason—the only fellow Mr. Fountain had really trusted. A telltale crack had developed over the cellar door. There was but one explanation. The head mason had substituted inferior materials. Mr. Fountain had crumpled under the impact of that discovery.

Papa sobered. "But I—"

"Oh, don't worry." Mr. Bostick's face reddened with suppressed laughter. "Mr. Fountain knew where to come for help. We Baptists believe in co-operation, don't we?"

Papa jabbed a finger at Mr. Bostick's gold watch chain. "You mean *you*—?"

"I mean I *really* told the whole lot of them off!" Mr. Bostick pulled out a handkerchief and mopped his eyes. "They tell me those fellows are doing a bang-up job, *now*."

We never did learn who got candy, if any.

The Swimming Pool Issue was up for settlement and was duly aired on the tennis courts the first Saturday afternoon after we arrived. Papa expressed himself as opposed to segregating the sexes. The ladies needed men around to act as lifeguards, he said. Only last summer he'd dived in to rescue a perishing female. The Swedish missionaries, too, were all for natural sporting arrangements. (We heard that Swedes went swimming in the nude in *their* homeland. Nobody suggested that for Ki Kung Shan, however.)

The pro's were more vocal. The Chinese would be offended. Chinese men seldom went swimming; with women, never! Missionaries and their children had to be constantly on guard lest they give wrong impressions to the heathen. The pro's mustered a formidable array of Scriptural quotations. (Ralph was dying to get the floor and exhort us all with "Let joy be unconfined," but Celia wasn't sure the reference was Biblical.)

On Tuesday a resolution carrying an imposing array of whereases and wherefores was sent from house to house, and the votes registered. All most democratic. But the pro's won. In due time a bulletin posted at the bathhouses announced a schedule of hours that would provide both male and female with an equal dispensation of sunshine and water. If the ladies were to swim in the morning, the men were assigned the afternoon. On the morrow the order was reversed. All very smooth; segregation seemed the complete answer.

For everyone but Papa. "Susie's not going in that pool without me. It's time she was learning to dive, anyway!" he announced one morning at breakfast. Susie put her bathing suit on at home and tagged blithely along after the boys. Papa dived in and pulled himself to the edge of the pool, shaking water from his eyes. "If you don't jump in, I'll throw you," he said. The trouble with Papa was he always meant what he said.

Susie liked to swim, but she loathed to dive. Twice she charged, only to retreat fearfully. On the third attempt she finally made the grade. Hardly had she resurfaced when one of the men approached Papa.

"Perhaps you hadn't noticed, Brother Herring, but Mr. Grimes has withdrawn from the pool because you brought your daughter in. This is *men's* morning to swim!"

Papa turned to look at Mr. Grimes. The offended brother sat staring at some remote object to the far left. Papa scrambled to his feet and called the boys. "No, don't stop to dress," he stormed. We plodded, dripping dismally, up the hill. "P-h-u-l-e!" he spelled out savagely. That way no one could accuse Papa of calling his brother a you-know-what.

Thereafter, at least once a week, Papa had Chen Tze-fu get a lunch ready and we hiked to a natural pool in the east valley where no man-made restrictions marred the beauty of falls and foliage. A minor point in the victory—as far as Susie was concerned—was the absence of any jumping-off-place. Papa never did lick her fear of diving.

One of the books Papa read to us on week nights that summer was *Ben Hur*. Papa shared Mother's disapproval of reading novels on Sunday. It so happened that Sunday and the chariot race turned up simultaneously. He finally decided it was an ox-in-the-ditch affair: we were too young to stand the tension so long. Alec sat in Papa's lap and the rest of us sprawled about, careful not to upset the kerosene lamp at his elbow.

Our combination porch–living room boasted no screens. June bugs zoomed in toward the light. At first they were annoying, then amusing. We got expert at catching them. Celia made a prison of the fretted portion of the lamp's base, using Papa's handkerchief to stop the holes. We weren't really inattentive. We could have played baseball and still kept up with the story. Once, when a prisoner escaped, Alec giggled, causing Papa to look over his glasses, puzzled at the reaction. Messala, the scoundrel, was gaining on our hero, but locally, the jail held! You could sneak your hand on the lamp and feel the trapped forces of evil!

We didn't have the heart to interrupt the chariot race, but the moment it was over, we asked Papa to lift the lamp. What a sight! Chen Tze-fu pushed open the door from the kitchen to see what we were up to now. It took so little to set us off. He shook his head in bafflement. How could he know the delirium of the discovery that now Pandora had nothing on us Herrings?

Just before we left the mountain, one of the ladies of the China Inland Mission conceived the idea of taking our picture as a means of encouraging Mother. We were all for encouraging Mother. We talked of her all the time, and on Sunday nights we smiled wistfully when people said they missed her solos. Papa kept her memory fresh by pointing down the valley toward the south and reminding us that before too many months she'd be coming back thence.

Our picture was to prove *most* encouraging. Her return to China could be described, even with proper respect for Mother, as headlong. "There was Celia, needing a petticoat; Gordon with bandages on his hand; Ralph, lame of foot; and Susie's hair barely restrained by elastic bands—I decided you needed your mother."

So we did. So we did, indeed. But in spite of everything, life with Papa had not been bad. Not bad at all!

CHAPTER 20

Free Indeed

The walls around our Chengchow home in no wise inhibited interest in the world about us. Papa saw to that. The *North China Daily News*—only forty-eight hours out of Shanghai—was as much a part of our breakfasts as oatmeal. We had discussions about current crises along with our daily bread, each of us convinced he was a prophet when it came to predicting the fate of China. There was no real authority when it came to public affairs, anyway. Our guesses as to what would come out of the confusion in Peking were as good as anyone's.

Mother thought the death of the Empress Dowager in 1908 was anticlimactic, in view of the anguish she'd caused. And ignorance as to whether or not the "Old Buddha" had been poisoned strangely clouded the issues now reported in the press. Was the sleeping dragon of ancient China really emerging as a power to be reckoned with, or had the throne been seized by another faction equally determined to isolate itself from Western nations? Until one knew what had actually happened, who could say?

September of 1911 found Papa hopeful about the political situation and happy over the newly-signed Anglo-Chinese opium agreement. Perhaps China would produce a George Washington to lead her into a new era of democracy.

"I think you're going to be sadly disappointed," Mother said. "There are many things worse than living under a monarchy, you know."

Papa grimaced. "There's no rule against hoping for the best, is there?"

Mother shrugged. She removed the cozy, refilled cups all around, and motioned Chen Tze-fu to replenish the teapot. "Do you think either Sun Yat-sen or Yuan Shih-kai can be trusted with the power they're trying for?"

Papa stirred sugar in his tea. "Yuan risked his neck for the foreigners during the Boxer uprising. He can't be *all* bad."

Mother raised her eyebrows. "The point is, neither of the men is *all* good. And to satisfy your—your American craving for leaders, a man would have to be just that—all good! Impossible!"

Chen Tze-fu coughed gently.

Papa stroked his moustache thoughtfully. Mother could always get the best of us in an argument. She had a way of marshaling uncomfortable facts from history—especially English history. Papa retreated into his favorite *non sequitur*. "Well the fact is, sometimes you can't always tell." He paused and his eyes danced. "Sometimes you can't always tell *who's* to bell the cat. . . ."

Chen Tze-fu coughed again. With Papa's attention secured at last, he backed away, bowing politely. "First-born sir has a guest seated in the study. Will you see him now, or after prayers?"

Papa tripped on his napkin and the door closed behind him. Chen Tze-fu sighed and retrieved the napkin. Why were foreigners so precipitate? Mother didn't see the expression on Chen's face, but we did and giggled.

A small vertical line creased Mother's forehead. She never liked to leave things in mid-air, especially where our education was concerned. "The Manchus aren't perfect, but they've maintained respect for authority for more than two hundred and fifty years. Your father just doesn't see that there's disaster ahead if too sudden changes are attempted. I think he should be more realistic."

She stood up. We knew we were to follow her into the living room for family prayers. That's what she usually did—took the burdens of the universe to God in prayer. "Sometimes I wonder where the world's headed for, anyway!" She sighed.

"Probably where it's been headed all along, wouldn't you say?" Gordon's comment, from behind the palm of his hand, was meant for his juniors only. But his voice was changing, and the bit of impertinence sprang up an octave, clearly audible to Mother. Mother didn't turn her head, but we could see her shoulders shaking. We always felt we'd accomplished something when we'd made Mother laugh.

Papa could not recall having seen his guest before, a man who said his name was Wang. During the initial courtesies of bowing, inquiring as to the absence of hunger, exchanging the honorable names, and so forth, Papa noted several facts about the young man. His cloth shoes were dusty but neatly made. The carefully shaven brow and the queue hanging in quiet dignity bespoke a man who, if not a scholar, was at least acquainted with the classics. The eagerness of expression was that of the very young—clean lines of brow and eyelids against sun-bronzed, bamboo-smooth skin. Clefts under high cheekbones parenthesized a generous mouth. The boy was from the country, but how had he arrived so early in the morning? What lay behind the urgency of a call at such an hour?

"*Ching tswo*," Papa said, offering a chair. He smiled and excused himself a moment to order tea.

Wang studied the room curiously. Books lined both inside walls almost to the ceiling. A yellow leather-backed dictionary sprawled wearily on its metal stand. Wang had never seen a book of such proportions, nor one so worn. The desk was littered with papers on which straggled columns of writing that almost seemed to be lying sidewise. He couldn't be sure. Wang had been taught to revere anything written, but the penciled marks looked completely unintelligible to him, not like writing at all. He recognized one Chinese book (a Bible) lying open beside another, not Chinese (a Greek New Testament). Oddly enough, they seemed to bear a neighborly sort of intent.

Hanging on the back of the door through which the foreigner had passed was a large leather jacket, its pockets bulging heavily. In the corner stood a double-barreled shotgun, its gleaming metal reflecting the greenish light that slanted through the open door from the porch.

Wang's wonder continued through the little ceremony of tea-drinking. The foreigner drank his tea single-handedly, but he had proffered the bowl to his guest in the approved manner—with both hands—graciously. Wang's uncle said all foreigners were crude beyond belief. But this man was not crude. Warm, perhaps, and impetuous, but a man to be trusted. Yes, that was it: a man to be trusted.

"Your honorable father is still living?" Papa broke the silence as gently as he could.

A pained expression flitted over the young man's face. "My father has been dead fourteen years."

Again there was a long silence, and Papa wondered if the whole morning was to be frittered away. There was so much to do in preparation for a class of inquirers to be held later in the week within the city. He schooled his fingers into quietness, remembering how Chinese hate the Western habit of drumming on a chair arm. Lines from the classics came to mind:

If you plant for a year, plant grain;
If you plant for ten years, plant trees;
If you plant for a hundred years, plant men.

Finally, Wang stood up and bowed deeply. He pushed his sleeves, long enough to cover his hands completely, upward in two graceful movements, baring his wrists. The gesture, not servile but somehow disarming, was useful in any number of situations and implied much. *Let's get down to business. . . . At your service, sir. . . . Shall we eat?*

Wang stepped over to the desk and gently removed the papers to bare a spot near Papa's arm. With one swift movement he lifted the front panel of his blue gown and brought out five strings of cash from his girdle, looping them neatly on the polished table. He bowed again and resumed his seat.

Papa raised his eyebrows. Now he could afford to wait. In good time the story would come.

It did. Not rushing like surface water, noisily, but welling up from some unlit source, some depth of experience not lightly shared yet hinting of more to follow. Papa kept his eyes lowered to spare the boy embarrassment. Gentle questions brought forth the story.

Wang and his uncle were coal merchants from the anthracite region in the hills that lay blue against the western horizon. They'd been coming to Chengchow every year for thirteen of Wang's twenty-one years, driving a train of panniered donkeys the fourteen-hour journey to market. With the arrival of the railroad, they'd noticed an increasing number of tall, fair-skinned people, said to have come from across a great sea. His uncle always spat contemptuously when they passed these barbarians on the street. But the price of coal had risen nicely.

Wang sat on the edge of his chair with his feet planted firmly and squarely before him, but the hem of his garment betrayed his nervousness. His voice was barely audible.

Papa refilled their cups, and smiled encouragingly.

Prosperity had been his uncle's downfall. Lately, the old man had been winding up at an opium den within the city walls. That meant they'd return to Mi Hsien empty-handed.

"And for three days we would eat nothing but bitterness!" Wang said. "Each time it was worse!"

"Sooner or later everybody eats bitterness," Papa said, thinking of Jeremiah's reference to teeth set on edge. Chinese expressions were as apt as those of Scripture.

"My father's mother—she is fierce, like a bird of prey. How does a son remain filial . . . ?" The boy lifted his cup again and drank lustily. At least he could show his host a proper appreciation. "My uncle—he is my father now, of course, but . . . ."

Papa was sure he could read the boy's frustrations. Fathers should act like fathers, especially in China, where being unfilial was the cardinal sin. But if they didn't, what could a son do about it?

Once, when Wang had tried to outwit the opium sellers and hide the money, he had regained consciousness, bruised and half-drowned, outside the city wall. Someone had pulled him from the moat beyond the east gate of the city. Several times he'd thought to leave the old scoundrel to his fate and escape to another part of the country. But the wrath of the gods would surely follow him!

"But tell me, what made you come to me?" Papa asked.

"It was what you said about being free indeed, Honorable Teacher."

If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed! Papa searched his memory. One of his favorite texts, but when had the boy heard it?

"You had a tent pitched in the market place, three moons ago. Does Senior Teacher not remember?"

Papa did remember. There had been other attractions at that particular fair: a Bengal tiger, a Punch and Judy show, even a turkey gobbler that had attracted more crowds than the pantomime. About all that Papa could recall were the curious crowds, the stifling dust, the long hours of explaining the *dao-li*—his wares, and a haunting sense of futility about it all.

Wang had wandered into Papa's tent more to get a nap on one of the free benches than for any other reason, but he found himself listening in spite of his fatigue. The idioms were unfamiliar and stilted. And yet, they bore a strange resemblance to the classics which he'd learned long ago in the village school. But there was something different . . . different. . . .

All the way home Wang had savored the gist of the words Papa had repeated. *If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed!* He liked the rhythm. Son . . . son . . . the implications were strongly filial. Of that he approved. He had made up his mind to investigate the matter further the next time he came to Chengchow. All the uncle could do was curse him or beat him.

But the next time he had come to Chengchow the tent had disappeared, and nobody remembered which of the foreigners was the philosopher of the carnival. His guarded inquiries, time after time, had met with no success. And then, yesterday, he'd seen Papa striding through the market place. He'd watched him buy peanuts and had asked the peanut vendors about him. Emboldened by the happy accident of meeting Papa again, he'd made off with the day's receipts before his uncle had dreamed of his intent. Here was a man who seemed to know the answer to life's riddles. He would importune Papa to act as middleman and set his paternal affairs straight. Keeping away from the thoroughfares where his uncle's cronies might spot him, Wang had skirted the cluster of huts, crossed the field, and taken up a watch just outside our compound gate. There he'd waited through the September night. It had been a long search, but happiness now lay within reach. He could afford to wait. . . .

The eagerness in Wang's face moved Papa profoundly. The young man had walked miles, asked endless questions, and waited hours. *Not many come running—either in or out of the Bible,* Papa thought. He clasped his hands thoughtfully in a gesture not discarded with his Chinese clothes. His elbow touched the cash. He'd forgotten the cash. Absently, his fingers explored the small metal pieces, some of them worn so thin as almost to cut his finger. His mind, too, groped with things intangible but none the less real. The boy wanted freedom. Who didn't? Did he think it could be bought? You had to move so gently in this business. Above all, you had to be honest, even when it hurt.

Wang was asking him something. Something he felt important. "You *will* keep it, First-born sir? You understand, it will give you prestige with my . . . ."

Papa shook his head, and the boy's face fell.

"And when my uncle has reformed, I can pay the debt, and my father's mother . . . ." His voice trailed off.

Papa leaned forward in his chair. "Don't you see? As long as you fear your uncle, you will not be free. Ever!"

Wang's brown eyes searched Papa's blue ones in a long silence. "Many times I have thought of what you said. *Why* am I not free? It is true, but *why?* Who is the Son? We have a slave girl at my home, and she is not free. But her parents sold her to us in time of famine. I have never been sold. Why am I not free?"

Papa picked up his Chinese Bible and turned the pages rapidly. "Read this, and this, and this," he said, pointing to character after character in the columns of heavy black calligraphy.

"Sold under sin, carnal . . . servants of sin . . . ." the boy's voice spoke the words with awe.

Papa was conscious of a stern cadence, like that of the heavy basses in Mother's rendering of Beethoven. He wouldn't have chosen to start here, but the choice had not been his. He rapped with his knuckles on his chest. "Here, if I am honest, I must admit there is wrong. I am selfish. I have been sold under sin."

Suddenly Papa's expression changed. Like the sweep of a sword, his finger cut across the air between them. Again he turned pages rapidly, holding the limp book in his left hand and moistening his finger at intervals, the better to turn the thin pages. "You ask who is the Son." The finger poised erect, pointing heavenward. "That is the most important part of all. You know of the Ancient in the heavens. Have you never heard He has a Son? One who can give us the filial feelings we all should have. Listen!"

This time Papa read the words himself, giving the tones a measured dignity that only a lifetime of devotion could impart. And yet, the wonder in his voice had a pristine quality, like that of a child. Wang's face glowed. He could not understand all of what he heard, but it was strangely believable.

They talked for hours.

In the early afternoon, Wang girded himself again with his cash, tenderly wrapped several new books in his blue handkerchief, and set off to solve his problem in the way a free man should. Nobody could predict quite what the outcome would be, except that it would bring him a dignity that had been lost—and coveted—since the beginning of time. . . .

Papa called Mother to come and meet their guest. They walked together to the gate and bowed low over clasped hands. Wang looked curiously at the boys playing tennis. A wistfulness in his glance reminded us of Naaman's request of the prophet of old. *Just a mule's burden of sanctified dirt to bolster his courage in days to come.*

"You will return?" Papa's question hung between them, and we children in the yard sensed the backwash of anxiety. Had the seed really taken root, or would fowls devour it? God alone knew.

A week later Wang was back again, his face glowing. "I cannot explain it," he said, "but I was not afraid, and the friends of my uncle . . . they had no strength. My uncle called me unfilial and cursed me for three days, but in my heart I knew I was not unfilial. Would you believe it, I don't even hate him now? I feel only pity, and that is clean, so-not-so?"

Papa nodded. "Yes, that is, as you say, clean."

"My friends ask me if I have drunk the foreign wine. I tell them to come and see." Wang pushed back his sleeves. "Honorable Teacher will come and tell my neighbors of the Father and the filial Son, won't you?"

Papa bowed. "I will come, and my wife with me," he promised.

That night we stood about Mother at the piano and sang one of our favorite hymns, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains." Papa sat in the big chair rocking Mary, who was growing much too big for that sort of thing. It was easy to see that Papa wouldn't have changed jobs with anyone in the world.

The imagery of the hymn was a bit flamboyant for our taste, but we loved the melody. Coral strands and spicy breezes seemed far removed from the life of the mission stations we knew. Mother's fingers stroked a sprightliness into the notes. No one could play hymns quite like Mother.

Waft, waft, ye winds, His story,
And you, ye waters, roll,
Till like a sea of glory
It spreads from pole to pole;
Till o'er our ransomed nature
The Lamb for sinners slain,
Redeemer, King, Creator,
In bliss returns to reign.

"Sing that last verse again," Papa ordered. We did. For once we had little to say as we made our way upstairs to bed. The story, as far as we could tell, wasn't carried by any winds and waters but by word of mouth, one frail human to another. But the good news *was* getting around. Therein lay the wonder. The good news was getting around, even to the hinterlands of China.

In October the political volcano erupted. A cache of bombs in Wuchang, across the river from Hankow, exploded prematurely and catapulted a group of insurgents into the limelight. The avowed leader, Sun Yat-sen, wasn't even in China. Confusion boiled into headlines. Bulletins issued by the various consulates warned foreigners of possible dangers to come. But home still seemed the safest place in the world.

Two days before Christmas, just as Papa pronounced the amen to the day's prayers, a telegram arrived from the Peking consulate. The gist of the message was *Get out, or we refuse responsibility for your lives.* Papa hurried over to discuss the situation with Mr. Lawton. The heads of the two families decided on immediate evacuation. The packing of our meagre belongings was more than usually hectic, but at the appointed hour we met our friends on the station platform to await the first train south. The train was due at any moment—the last one, for all anyone knew. There was no going back for forgotten Christmas presents.

For hours we rejoiced in the escape of our playmates from the stern regime of duties imposed by their mother. Here Mrs. Lawton could find few tasks to keep idle hands out of mischief. For want of anything else to do, we pushed baggage trucks around until we were grimy and tired. Still no train.

Just before dawn of the next day, a freight pulled in, filled for the most part with soldiers. One car was crowded with missionaries from north of the Yellow River. We clambered aboard and joined the ranks of the refugees.

"Excuse my back, being behind," a Swedish lady said. We wondered where else it could have been, but nobody laughed. Politeness was about the only commodity left to share.

It was a long, cheerless journey. We were asleep when we passed Sien Tien, lying at the foot of our beloved

Ki Kung. One or another of the adults directed our waking hours in playing games, or singing songs, or making up limericks, but the tedium was horrible. So was the lack of soap and water.

In Hankow, after accommodations were secured for the party on a Shanghai-bound steamer, Papa and Mr. Lawton ventured across the river to take a good look at the havoc wrought by the revolutionists. Perhaps in the wreckage of the buildings some clue could be found as to what lay in the future—speculations concerning it having monopolized adult conversations for days.

Papa returned to the ship and reported little of interest to be seen. He called us together with extravagant enthusiasm. In his arms he carried a huge paper sack.

"Come on, everybody. Let's exchange our Christmas presents!"

Alec and Mary slid to a halt, wide-eyed before him. Several Chinese children edged closer. The rest of us had been rather dejected about the whole business of Christmas this year. We knew, already, Papa's habit of understating the celebration, and now seemed a particularly poor time for reviving illusions about being merry. Ralph and Susie leaned against the railing and stared into the muddy water. Susie blinked back her tears and stole a glance at Celia. Had Celia done the impossible? Could that huge paper bag hold . . . ? But no, Chengchow had no such bags. . . .

Susie sniffed. She remembered a certain guiltily gorgeous moment two weeks before. She'd been rummaging in Celia's dresser drawer—where she had no business to be rummaging—trying to find a hair ribbon good enough for Sunday. Instead, she'd found a blue silk doll dress, hand-smocked and with buttons—*real* buttons and button holes. Ecstasy had bubbled within her. The dress was just right for her doll, Henrietta! And *blue!* Mary's things were always red; Susie's blue. Softly she'd closed the drawer and drawn a lilting breath. Like honeysuckle. Like peonies. O-o-o-o! She remembered how her shoulders had floated. Wouldn't Christmas be wonderful?

She sniffed again. And now the revolutionists would probably find it. *Her* gift! They might even stick it through with the bayonets they were always poking around at the Chinese. Perhaps—perhaps she and Celia—but no, it wasn't anything you could talk about. Not here.

Ralph dug his arm into her side. "Crybaby!" he muttered.

"Everybody ready?" Papa called brightly. Then out they came. Oranges. One for each of us. Two for each of us. "Hurry, find somebody to exchange them with. Merry Christmas, everybody!"

Susie held hers, one in each hand. They were the first she'd ever seen, ever handled. Bumpy, firm, and cool! They smelled funny. Not like honeysuckle or peonies. Celia crossed the deck and exchanged her larger orange for Susie's smaller.

"Merry Christmas," Celia said gaily. *It was a good thing Susie didn't know about the doll dress,* she thought.

Susie sniffed. Ralph was already pulling off the skin of his. He hopped back from the dripping juice. "Eat it, silly!"

But Susie didn't have much appetite. She wandered through clumps of native refugees, huddled in every available spot on the decks, the oranges clutched in her hands. She could scarcely remember living elbow to elbow with the Chinese, as she had in Chining. Oddly enough, they didn't seem to mind the confusion here. They just sat. Now and again a child would look at her timidly and smile. Once she ducked briefly and left her oranges beside the bare feet of a little boy. *She'd have died if anyone had seen her.* After that, it was easier to swallow, somehow. Papa would get some more oranges. And she, at least, had a bed to sleep in. She didn't have to just sit, day and night, as if she had no feelings at all.

The Lawtons complained about the crowded condition of decks and saloon. They had taken this route annually to their summer home in Kuling, and (we were assured) things had never been so crowded or smelly before. The boys eyed the water line and speculated about the tare tonnage. In view of the ship's sparse lifesaving equipment, we were glad we'd learned to swim. (As if that would have done any good!) Our navigating experience, in contrast to that of the Lawtons, had been notably limited. But even under the present conditions, steam-driven ships were a great improvement over the native houseboats we had known. We proceeded to enjoy our voyage to the full. As refugees, we weren't faring badly at all.

But Shanghai was a different matter. On Quen Ming Road we were one among hundreds of families, most of them uprooted, too. The creek in front of the dingy row of houses smelled of fish and garbage. Even the cries of the early morning vendors had an alien sound. "O-lan-gee, O-lan-gee!" (What a way to pronounce *orange!*)

We were promptly enrolled in Jewells' School, and hated it. The primness of the Misses Jewell had undergone none of the modification that Mother's had. The ladies lacked American husbands and were to be pitied, perhaps, but we were too busy feeling sorry for ourselves. Whoever heard of making Manners an end in themselves?

The playground was a high-walled, triangular affair with barred gates, like some scene out of Dickens. As far as we were concerned, it was a misnomer. How could you call it a playground when you couldn't play? Our ignorance of Western ways was almost gruesome. If only someone had broken down and *shared* a thing or two! Were English boys *born* knowing how to play cricket? And their sisters *born* knowing better than to try? Worst of all, we had to bottle up our resentments till we got home, recess being a segregated matter, not only grade from grade, but boys from girls. While admittedly brothers were a pain in the neck, there were times when we could have welcomed the annoyance. Gladly. Gordon, Ralph, and Alec were dubbed "Bloaters I, II, and III," like sizes of sardine cans, and with as much affection. Gordon was sure that the slump of his shoulders (which Mother thought due to his early childhood illnesses) had much to do with his being singled out for teasing. We had a lot to gripe about, and we did it thoroughly, every afternoon after school.

One afternoon Gordon burst into the house in a fury. He was taking no more from that bully who'd been making his life miserable. It looked as if Gordon's education was skidding to a stop. He was stoutly refusing to go back to school.

Papa strode up and down the cramped living–dining room. Mother suggested having a talk with Miss Jewell. Papa vetoed that. He was all for authority in its proper place, but anyone worth his salt had to learn when to assert his independence without relying on authority. He wheeled suddenly and faced Mother. “And don’t you go quoting Scripture at him,” he said. “It’s a man’s motives that count!”

Nobody actually told Gordon what to do. Perhaps it was the word “man” that triggered his reflexes. The next day he returned, minus shirt buttons, plus a black eye, and in his hand a reprimand in writing from one of the Misses Jewell. His smile was triumphant.

Papa took the note and grinned. “I thought you could han’le the situation,” he said. Gordon straightened his shoulders and felt six feet tall.

Papa couldn’t stand the inactivity of life in Shanghai. He decided to head up the coast to Dairen on an evangelistic tour. The following day, Ralph came home, jubilant. Miss Jewell was sure he had the measles. He did. So did we all, all honorable men under a common scourge, to hear Ralph tell it, when the condition became apparent. (Ralph’s allusions were usually more bombastic than relevant.) Miss Blanche Walker—friend of Gospel Mission days—moved in to help Mother, who missed the servants and freedom of the Chengchow home as much as we did, apparently. Blankets were hung at the windows to keep the light from ruining our eyes. In semidarkness we underwent steaming ablutions to bring out the rash and lessen the effect of the fever. The tub was a horrible, mustard-colored affair, too small for anyone but Mary to sit in. Alec was sure the measly bathtub was to blame for our present woes. Anyway, it became for us the symbol of all the frustrations of refugee living.

The Lawtons enrolled their children in the Shanghai American School, where they would remain until summer, when the family was due to go home on furlough. Our own furlough would come later—after we had recovered from measles, refugee living, and the Misses Jewell's school.

The political cauldron simmered down, and we left Shanghai a short time later. Home was never sweeter than when we returned at long last to Chengchow.

CHAPTER 21

For Heaven's Sake

Papa was anxious to go to Mi Hsien to see Wang. A small group of the young coal dealer's neighbors had been meeting in his home, and now they were thinking of hiring a chapel for regular worship. All this had been accomplished while we were in Shanghai and without any kind of supervision on the part of the missionaries. Papa was proud of the initiative shown in this, his newest field, but he knew that the young converts needed to be established. Mother dreaded the twelve-hour donkey ride to the foothills. She didn't want to leave us in charge of the servants with the political situation so unsettled, but she would never be remiss in her duty. (Seldom did we share these missionary journeys. We had our lessons to do, and our parents saw no point in subjecting us to unnecessary hardships.)

"Wang's invitation included all the children," Papa said. "He says no one in Mi Hsien has seen white children and his neighbors would be most honored." Papa decided that we could learn many lessons in the hinterland—lessons not yet incorporated in textbooks anywhere, so far as he could tell.

One of our first lessons was the adage of the American stage: *the show must go on.* Not wind, nor weather, nor migraine, nor pack sores could veer Papa from keeping a promise. In the darkness of early morning we mounted eight donkeys. Two hours later, Gordon discovered why his beast bucked and plunged whenever he mounted: the donkey's back was covered with raw, festering sores. Gordon elected to walk.

Mother produced some vaseline, which she rubbed on the donkey's back. "Will you send this one back to Chengchow?" she asked Papa.

Papa was busy removing the saddle pack and distributing the load between the other animals. He glanced sharply at the driver's face. "No," he said. "He'd likely hire the wretch out again. This way, the back gets at least twelve hours of rest."

The journey was resumed, seven saddle packs pitching left and right with little or no rhythm. Susie had a migraine, and wound up outheaving *her* saddle pack. But on we jogged, stopping only at noon for a meal at a food shop.

In the late afternoon we came in sight of Mi Hsien. Its crenelated walls stood dark against a bright sunset. Winter wheat fields spread green across the horizon. This could have been the city of which the Lord spoke. Set on a hill, unhidden. And yet so unexploited. A multitude of blue-clad men, women, and children poured from the gate to welcome us. They plucked at our skirts to see what clothes lay under the surface and commented on the size of our feet—mammoth by their standards. As Papa said, this was something you couldn't write home about. The flavor perished in the telling.

All the next day we remained the feature attraction. Wang set a feast for us under his courtyard tree. Charcoal burners kept the food hot. Our host implored us to eat until we could eat no more. Then he suggested we run about the table to work up a new appetite. After we'd eaten, Wang brought out a large teakwood altar table, formerly dedicated to ancestor worship. That was to be Papa's pulpit. Wang shouted for his neighbors to give attention.

"Tell us, what is that bright thing in the teacher's mouth?" a youth asked. He meant no impertinence.

Papa opened his mouth to display the gold cap on a tooth. "The doctor put it there to keep me from having the toothache," he explained. Sermonizing had to start on the level of his audience.

It's hard to remember what Papa talked about, exactly. He paid no attention to the chickens, children, and pigs strolling about. *They* didn't bother him. He was conscious that many of these people would hear this message but once. How to keep it simple was his chief problem. To say enough, yet not too much. Better to strike one clear note over and over again than to try for a chord. Planting and harvest, birth and death, health and pestilence, all follow in cycles; but *one* fact remains: God loves us. Like as a father—not an avenging judge—God loves us. . . .

Late in the afternoon the crowd parted to admit a small excited woman. Papa had been speaking until he was hoarse and welcomed the break.

"Here's your friend, Alice," he said in English.

Mother's friend was a convert from a village ten miles distant. Her name was Mrs. Feng. She threw her arms about Teacher-mother, acknowledged each of us, turning to congratulate Papa six times over. You'd have thought we were royalty.

"How's your memory work?" Mother asked.

"Not quite through with the Gospel of John," she said. "But I know his Epistles already! Wang has heard me recite them."

"Tell the Senior-teacher about the *ma pi!*" Wang said.

Mrs. Feng covered her lips in embarrassment.

"What's this about the sorcerer?" Mother prodded. Always there was the threat of old fears returning to drag new converts back into superstition again. But Mrs. Feng didn't look as if she'd been dragged far.

"Would you believe it?" Mr. Wang said. "The *ma pi* now asks permission of Mrs. Feng before coming and going."

"He may *ask* permission, but he doesn't get it!"

We watched Mrs. Feng's hands. When she was self-conscious, they fluttered about her lips or pressed her cheek. At other times her fingers moved with the clear grace of a calligrapher's brush, bringing life to her narrative. We listened to the words and watched the hands as this little bound-footed woman told how she had triumphed over the scorn of her neighbors.

It had been a dry summer and the crops were shriveling in the field. Unless rain came soon, there would be little to harvest. Anxiously the neighbors scanned the skies, but the only clouds were those of yellow dust that choked the air above the parched earth. Suddenly one sleepy afternoon the clamor of voices had drawn Mrs. Feng to her gate.

"Give him enough and he'll produce rain." It was the sorcerer's agent, drumming up trade.

"*Ai yah!* His price is too steep. How do you think we can afford so much, with the millet dried up?" The village elder spread his hands in a gesture of hopelessness.

"Don't you pay him," Mrs. Feng ordered. "Only the true God sends or withholds rain. You should believe Him!"

The crowd laughed. "She's eaten the missionary's doctrine and become a *sa-tze ban gwah* (melon-head)," a neighbor taunted.

The village elder shook his head. *Let the people have their excitement if they choose it.* "No token payment," he said finally. "Get what money you like when you enter the village, but none now."

On the day set for the procession Mrs. Feng watched her neighbors stream out of the gates. Rebellion mounted within her. Was the *ma pi* man or demon? It didn't matter. There couldn't be anything good about a human being vaunting his ability to lie atop a score of wicked-looking nails. Her God was greater than these greedy sorcerers. Hadn't He rescued Daniel from the lion's den? Last year she had memorized the words, *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* It must be true. Hai Teacher-mother always told the truth.

Hurrying to the dung heap just outside the village gate, she climbed atop it. "He's not coming through our village," she told the bystanders, mostly women with babies or the crippled who couldn't join the excitement on the horizon.

"Who's to stop him?" they taunted. "You?"

"Wait and see."

The heat shimmered and danced across the fields. Crows settled near the crowd, sensing a good time for scavenging. The day wore on. Still the *ma pi* lingered in the distance.

"What's the matter? How can he bring us any rain if he takes so long off there?"

Mrs. Feng was getting very tired. She shifted her weight from heel to heel, peering toward the *ma pi* at intervals, after each glance closing her eyes tightly, her lips moving. Cost what it might, her determination must not waver.

Two youths jogged toward her. "Get off that dunghill," they panted. "Hurry. The *ma pi* says he can't come this way until some woman gets down from a dunghill!"

"And who's to make me?" Now it was Mrs. Feng's turn to taunt. "Is he afraid of a mere woman? You tell him I'm not getting off!"

By the laughter of the crowd, she knew her neighbors were with her, now. "See?" she said. "Who told that robber he couldn't come through our village? The true God in the heavens, that's who."

Perhaps not as spectacular as Elijah's famous contest on Mount Carmel, her defiance had nevertheless sparked the imaginations of the villagers. *One small woman against all the powers of the devil! It was enough to bring down the ire of the gods, if any. Maybe she knew what she was talking about. Maybe there was but one true god.* Sai tze-dao? *Who could tell?*

Late in the afternoon the cloud of dust began to move. Finally the sorcerer began his retreat. Mrs. Feng sighed. It had been a long vigil.

Telling it to Mother, she sighed again. "But that's what you told me, *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* So-not-so?"

But for every convert there were fifty thousand unregenerates. Simple unregenerates Papa could tolerate. Thieves, never. According to public opinion there was no disgrace in stealing—only in being caught. Papa hadn't been in Chengchow long until it was noised about that thieves were in disgrace with Papa, period. More than that, Papa could be counted on to make his opinion *public.* Thieves learned to give him a wide berth. Finally.

The most notable encounter with a thief came one morning after the fury of an early spring storm had swept across the compound. Tzu Niu, the cowman, appeared at the top of the back stairs, his face a mile long.

"The cow's gone!"

Papa had just shaved the lather from one cheek. His suspenders hung like panniers from either side of his lithe frame. In one swift motion he slid into shoes and girded for a chase. He pelted the stammering boy with questions. The half-face of stubble could wait. "You sleep right above her. Didn't you hear anything?"

"But there was such a storm!"

We huddled behind Mother in the doorway. It was fun to have a Scotland Yard in our own compound, so to speak.

"What time did the rain stop, Alice?" Papa asked. Mother always seemed aware of everything, day or night.

"Sometime after three o'clock. I fell asleep as soon as the storm passed." Mother stooped to pick up the razor strop. "David!" her voice rose in consternation. "You're not going after him yourself?"

But Papa was clattering down the steps. "Got four hours start on us! We'll have to hurry." The words trailed off.

Outside the gate they followed tracks in the fresh mud. Papa had stuffed bread into his pocket, and they munched as they strode. "Blossom is the first heifer I've had by George Washington and that p-h-u-l-e may have butchered her already!"

Tzu Niu grunted. He didn't like the bread, but he wouldn't say so. He couldn't keep up with Papa and talk, anyway.

Papa was sure they'd catch the thief by noon. But a flock of sheep on the edge of a village had obliterated the tracks. Papa scanned the road in frustration. He slumped on a bench in front of a food shop. A brisk wind swayed the drooping branches of a willow overhanging the shop. Papa wished he were in a mood to enjoy it. The air had an amber quality, rain-washed from the storm of the night before. He could see, under the thatched roof of the house next door, tier after tier of mats on which fed hordes of silkworms. Women moved about shredding mulberry leaves for the hungry, greenish-white worms. Children who'd been playing about their mothers splashed through the puddles and stopped to gaze at Papa. One proudly displayed a small red jacket and bright green shoes, both evidently new. Just jacket and shoes; the rest of him—protruding brown stomach and buttocks—was as bare and unabashed as on the day of his birth.

The food shop owner came out into the sunlight. Papa ordered bowls of *mien tiao*. "Has anyone seen a black-and-white heifer?" Papa asked.

"First-born sir, more better not seem too eager," Tzu Niu whispered.

Their host waved an earthy-looking dishrag toward chickens that had hopped up beside his guests. "Is she about so high, and does she have a leather halter?" The man was more than helpful.

Papa nodded eagerly. "That's the one! Which direction did she go?"

The man scratched his head. He pointed west. "That way, honorable sir. Didn't the scoundrel eat with competitor across the way, when everybody knows I serve better food at less cost?"

"I hope you catch the turtle," he called to Papa's back. The bystanders laughed loudly. Calling the thief a turtle had nothing to do with his speed. It was just a low-down sort of curse word.

On the far side of the village, Papa still couldn't find Blossom's tracks.

Tzu Niu straightened up and sighed deeply. "We should have known," he said. "Man say thief go west, he go east!"

"Thunderation!" Papa stormed. "Now we've lost two hours!"

Toward evening, he knew they were gaining on the thief. Finally the tracks led past a spirit wall into a native home. Papa crept up behind his quarry and laid a firm hand on his shoulder. He whirled but made no move to resist. He'd been trying to effect a hasty sale of the cow, but the jig was plainly up.

Late that night Papa sat soaking his feet in hot water and relating his experience to Mother.

"You mean to say you hired a wheelbarrow and then walked most of the way yourself? Two could ride. Why didn't you take turns?"

"Oh, we did. My turns were brief. I just didn't have the heart to make Tzu Niu walk that much more. He'd been a good sport. And, after all, I knew just how tired he was. The other fellow, that wretch of a thief, didn't look as if he'd had enough to eat in so long that—well, I just couldn't make him suffer. Anyway, I'm used to it!"

In the morning Papa delivered the thief to the yamen. "At least he's had *one* square meal," he said apologetically to Mother. "I only hope they don't mistreat him."

But they did. Papa made repeated efforts to have his thief released, but the more interest he showed, the worse the victim fared. Papa wound up paying a sizable ransom.

Papa handled the punishment of the next thief himself. One summer night when he was alone in Chengchow, he woke to the sound of stealthy footsteps downstairs. Stealthy himself, he surprised the burglar just as he was getting the loot stowed away for the climb over the wall. Papa hauled him back to the study and set him down roughly. Now wasn't he a dolt? A clock, two vases, a fur-lined jacket several sizes too big for him, and skates that were broken to begin with! Didn't he know he would be a marked man?

Papa tied him up scornfully. He sat down to consider what to do. At least the rascal would get his rest disturbed as much as Papa's had been. They eyed each other mutely, balefully. After all, there wasn't much to chat about. By morning Papa had decided what to do. Just *enough* loss of face, but not too much to take at one time. There was a subtle art to the business of meting out punishment if you took pains to study your culprit.

Making sure the front gate was open and the scene quite visible to all who hurried by on their way to the railroad, Papa tied his rogue carefully and publicly to a tree just within the compound wall. More than once he tested the knots. From inside the house he watched his victim. It shouldn't take more than an hour or two at most, he figured. By noon the thief was free, and Papa breathed a sigh of relief. He'd mete out punishment if he had to, but he didn't really enjoy the process.

CHAPTER 22

His Own, His Native Land

Our distaste for Shanghai living may have brought to Papa's attention a need to prepare us for furlough in the States. Life in the port had been more like that of America than anything Chengchow could offer, but none of us had enjoyed it. Papa's wistful references to the "homeland" seemed anomalous. Our attitude convinced him that something had to be done, but for once Mother wasn't helpful. Still two years in the future, our furlough was already being regarded by her with dread. She had some kind of antipathy for the South and would need educating as much as we did. Up until this time, she'd had a relatively free hand in our upbringing. Any modification of our mores now could bring frowns of disapproval. Papa had never been one to run from conflict, however.

We had known for some time that Mother and Mrs. Lawton differed radically in their methods of rearing children. We supposed that British and American ways were bound to differ—ever since 1776. But now, Papa was forcing us to take sides, as it were: enlisting our loyalties to a heritage that had meant much to him, and as it concerned our future, should mean much to us. His campaign became a sort of daily affair.

Ralph was the only one of us not born in China, although all of us were "natural born" and duly registered citizens. Papa held the opinion then current that only a citizen, "natural born" and, further, *born on American soil,* could qualify for the Presidency. He encouraged Ralph to pride in this distinctive fact, and us to envy. Laying a hand on Ralph's brown head, he would say proudly to a guest, "Here's the only one who can become President of the United States!"

A small cog slipped in Ralph's imagination: he thought his destiny assured. "When I'm President, I'll remember this against you," he'd warn Alec at the slightest infraction of his will.

The day came that Alec felt big enough to demolish Ralph's castles of air. They had been playing marbles in the hall while the rest of us were reading in the living room. Angered enough finally, Alec had caught Ralph by the ankles and lunged, upsetting two chairs and the umbrella stand.

"Boys! boys!" Mother scolded from the doorway. She never allowed fighting.

Papa laid a restraining hand on her arm. He said nothing, but the implication was clear. Americans should fight for their independence if necessary: being a rebel wasn't the worst thing in the world.

The day Papa found Susie dissolved in tears over

Uncle Tom's Cabin, he confronted Mother indignantly. "What's she doing with that—that thing?"

"It won't hurt her," Mother said calmly.

Not willing to take a chance, Papa brought *Uncle Remus* out of the bookcase and set about rectifying false notions of Southern character by holding nightly sessions with "Brer Rabbit, Miss Meadows en de gals." This was a second performance for the benefit of the younger three. Celia, Gordon, and Ralph, having heard it before, formed a choric background, their ingenuity challenged to see how far they could try Papa's patience without stalling the motor entirely, so to speak.

For educating a spring and fall crop of children, Papa had divided the family squarely in the middle. The arrangement didn't disturb the solidarity of the family, since we never suffered the disintegrating influence of a central heating system. Through the long, cold winters of Honan, we were never far apart, physically. Most of the house was like Outer Mongolia to us, bleak and frigid and barely inhabited. We ate, dressed, studied, practiced piano, violin, or whatever within the confines of the only warm room in the house.

Undressing at night was quite an art. All of us wore stockings that Mother had knitted, which we pulled with difficulty over the folded legs of our long underwear. We got adept at slipping out of the whole affair, leaving the shell more or less intact. Dressing in the morning was then much simpler. When the last member of the family had shivered off to bed in the upper regions, eight chairs ranged about the hearth, each dangling its quota of long underwear and hyphenated hosiery, punctuated below by a pair of Chinese cloth shoes. And in the morning when Chen Tze-fu came to build a fire for the new day's activities, he was welcomed by the motley array of ghostly apparel.

Over the floor would lie a fine carpet of loess dust, sometimes—depending on the fury of the wind in the night—piled into small pyramids at the door. Usually the wind blew three days violently from the west, yellowing sun and sky with its burden from the Gobi Desert. Then the wind would change and begin again its work of deportation—back to the Desert again.

Transporting our imaginations from such an atmosphere into warm Southern woodlands to "see how de ballance er de settlement wuz gettin' 'long," was an accomplishment that called forth the best of Papa's histrionic ability. With Papa looking frequently over his spectacles to see if we presented a semblance of listening, the sessions went something like this:

> . . . Brer Rabbit slap de spurrers into Brer Fox flanks, en you better b'leeve he got over groun'. W'en dey got ter de house, Miss Meadows en all de gals wuz settin' on de peazzer, en stidder stoppin' at de gate, Brer Rabbit rid on by, he did, en den come gallopin' down de road en up ter de hoss-rack, w'ich he hitch Brer Fox at, en den he santer inter de house, he did, en shake han's wid de gals, en set dar, smokin' his seegyar same ez a town man.

"Must have been the way Papa showed off before his girl at the 'Sociation meetings," Gordon observed to Ralph.

"Who, me?" Papa grinned slyly. This was what he wanted: a little more, and Gordon would be talking like a

Tar Heel. Papa laughed. "Ah, but you should've seen my brothers. Jimmie and Johnnie gave the girls a fit!"

Papa was plainly in the mood for reminiscence.

"Well?" he asked belligerently, when no one rose to the bait. "Doesn't anyone want to hear about the time Jimmie fell into the creek? What's the use of having uncles—?"

"What happened, Papa?" Mary, perched on Papa's lap, was busily engaged in twisting his thinning locks into a pair of grizzled horns more comical than ferocious.

"Well, it was like this. They were both courtin' old man Croom's daughters who lived on the far side of Long Creek from the church."

"Was that near where Brer Rabbit lived?" Mary wanted to know.

"Just down the road a piece." Papa nodded. "Just down the road. But this old man Croom wasn't one to let his gals go anywhere four in a buggy. Only a step to church, he 'lowed they could walk.

" 'How we goin' to cross the old foot-log without gettin' our feet wet?' " As Papa mimicked the "gal" we could almost see her and hear her Southern drawl. " 'We ain't got no lantern!' "

"Such language!" Mother muttered.

Papa closed his eyes to shut out distractions. "You can bet that Jimmie had the answer! 'Shucks, Honey, what we need with an old lantern? Ain't we got the light of your pretty eyes?'

" 'Course Johnnie heard this but he knew better'n to let on." Papa's voice grew dreamy. "Guess it's darker down under those cypresses than any place in the world."

He chuckled. "Sure 'nuff, Jimmie slipped and fell into the creek up to his knees."

" 'Oops, Jimmie!' his gal said.

"Johnnie let out a whoop. Folks at the church were bound to have heard him. 'Oops, Jimmie,' he called. 'Did she shut her eyes on you?' "

Everybody laughed, Gordon and Ralph loudest of all. The joke was old, but it was smart to show appreciation of Papa's efforts. Not that his efforts were ever wasted. We'd grown as fond of our white uncles as of Uncle Remus—almost.

Papa resumed his reading.

> En den Brer Rabbit sorter grin, he did, en de gals giggle, en Miss Meadows, she praise up de pony, en dar wuz Brer Fox hitch fas' ter de rack, en couldn't he'p hisse'f.

No, Papa's efforts weren't wasted. If Joel Chandler Harris supplied the threads, it was Papa who wove them into a magic carpet. We found this out one night when Papa was off on one of his periodic trips to the country.

"Read us *Uncle Remus*, Mother," Alec begged.

"Mother can't—ouch!" Celia spluttered trying to return Gordon's sub-table kick. The boys had ganged up on Mother and there was little she could do about it.

"Oh, I say, Mother, that would be ripping!" Gordon said. He'd been impressed by the vocabulary of a recently visiting Englishman.

"I'll read to you, but let's find something else," Mother said.

"No, read *Uncle Remus*." Ralph's fatuous grin should have warned her of mischief afoot. "By thunder, I was just getting hungry for some more *Uncle Remus*."

"Don't say 'by thunder'!" Mother said sternly. "Where do you get such language, anyway?"

"It's British, isn't it?" Gordon asked mildly. "Must have been something George Washington failed to do anything about."

"If I don't say 'by thunder,' will you read it, will you Mother, huh?" Ralph was always quick to scent the possibility of a bargain.

"Get your feet on the floor and behave yourselves, then." She was still unaware of being manipulated.

The boys chose the sequel to Papa's favorite tale, the one about the time Brer Fox nearly dealt Brer Rabbit his comeuppance.

With a frown of concentration she began. Trying to fathom the sense of what she read, she unconsciously amended the curtailed endings and lost consonants. Americanization had never quite eliminated her broad *a*'s nor subdued the click of syllables. Getting the story across to us in German would have been easier. But Mother was no quitter. She finished each clause on a high questioning note, as if unsure of the whole business.

> "I'd er rid 'im over dis mawnin',—*morning?*—ladies," sezee, "but I rid 'im so hard yistiddy—*yesterday?*—dat he went lame in de off fo' leg,—*follicle? oh, foreleg!*—en I 'speck I'll hatter—*have to?*—swop 'im off yit," sezee.

The sound of her voice was suddenly cut short by a rippling giggle from Alec. Mother looked up to find Gordon and Ralph rolling helplessly on the floor, trying to control their mirth without stopping the show. With a whoop we all shouted together until even Rover joined in with excited barks. (Rover always entered into our fun, refusing to live a dog's life, outside, as Mother would have preferred.) Mother laughed until tears flowed.

Papa's childhood was probably no more romantic than Mother's, but somehow he created about it an aura that never failed to charm us.

"Weren't you scared when the Yanks came?"

"Scared? 'Course I was scared. Everybody was scared. We could hear the guns all the way from Fort Fisher and we thought the end of the world had come."

"What did Grandma do?"

"Ma?" Just the way he spoke her name told us much. Folks just didn't ignore Ma. "She had me tie the mule in the swamp."

"Five years old, and you could take care of a mule?" Ralph asked incredulously.

"What's a swamp?" Mary asked.

"A swamp? A swamp is a—a swamp, that's what." How could he explain to children in interior China what a swamp was, and why be nonplused about the difficulty?

"But the Yankees didn't get the mule, did they?" Ralph remembered the important details from former sessions. "Not then, because Grandma—"

"Yeah, because 'Grandma' had a way with her." He laughed. " 'Twasn't the mule's fault they didn't get him, though. Just at the wrong moment he brayed loud and long as Gabriel's trump. But those fellows just mounted their horses and tipped their hats like they didn't hear nothin' at all." The double negative was strictly for Mother's benefit.

"Where was Grandpa?"

"In the army. All the men were gone. Once I went to stay with Pa in camp. I couldn't have been more than three, four years old. I remember I rolled out of the tent and woke up with the stars shinin' down. I was frightened, but the men laughed, and then I liked it.

"Later we went to stay with Grandpa Wells until the war was over. Guess they must have thought there was safety in numbers, for we must have had forty-'leven cousins in that one little house."

"Was that the time you tried out your new knife on Wells's Chapel?"

Papa snorted. "There weren't any new knives anywhere, much less new churches then. No, that was a long time later. While I was walking on crutches, because I remember skedaddling on those crutches." He grinned. "The boys couldn't outrun me, either."

Sometimes we learned about Papa's childhood by what Mother called invidious comparison, whatever that was.

"No wonder you can't spell," he'd fume at Alec, who always had difficulty with his spelling. "We don't even have a Webster's blue-backed speller in the house!"

Mother's spelling had flourished by other means. "What has Webster's blue-back got to do with it?"

"It's the syllables. I-G ig, N-O no, R-A ra, M-U-S mus, ignoramus. See? That's the way?"

"Yeah, but who wants to be one?" Ralph objected. "Anyway, it's easier to call upstairs to Mother, isn't it?"

"I only do that when I can't remember whether it's *i-e*, or *e-i*."

"I seem to remember hearing Mollie tell how she trailed you over fences and through the underbrush teaching you that same blue-backed speller," Mother suggested dryly.

"Aren't you ashamed?" Gordon inquired virtuously, and all of us grinned, Papa most of all.

There was something revealing in Papa's expression. He *liked* us spirited. That way, life would be richer for us in America—or anywhere. He would even have liked to draw sparks from Mother. Perhaps it was this fact that moved him to fond recollections of his first wedding—always at mealtime, for some reason.

Meals in summer were a lot of fun. Usually we lingered about the table long after Chen Tze-fu had cleared the dishes and scooped up the tablecloth. For one thing, the punkah swinging over the table afforded a welcome relief from heat and flies; and for another, if we kept talking we were less likely to be given a chore of some kind to keep us out of mischief.

The punkah had been Papa's idea. Since none of the other mission families had stooped to such panderings to the flesh, we felt its possession gave us definite prestige. Mother, however, eyed it with little enthusiasm. Our amah, Yang Sao-tze, had made it from remnants of our former apparel. She'd pasted layer after layer of the cloth to form a stiff panel variegated like Joseph's coat of many colors. Tzu Niu, with the odor of cows still about him, could sit in the adjoining study and pull the rope that ran on a pulley through the wall. We supposed the punkah was quite as good as anything America had to offer. Certainly it was distinctive.

"I wouldn't call it exactly elegant," Mother said. "Are you sure it won't fall on the table?"

There was little that could be called elegant in the curtainless room. The light, reed-bottom chairs aged quickly under our contortions, and the table swayed slightly with the last addition of an extending leaf. Against one wall was a long bamboo table that passed for a sideboard. But Mother always seemed to bring her own elegance to the scene, her hand on the cosied teapot, ready to pour hot tea at a moment's notice. Behind her, a charcoal portrait of Longfellow gazed down at us, bearded and benign. It was a rather well done affair that Maggie had accomplished in the Oxford (North Carolina) Female Academy.

Down the avenue of children, Papa gazed fondly at his favorite poet. The cadenced words came softly:

As unto the bow the cord is,
So unto the man is woman,
Though she bends him, she obeys him,
Though she draws him, yet she follows,
Useless each without the other!

"The sentiment applies to the first Mrs. Herring, I presume?" Mother said. We knew from the tight little expression about her mouth that she preferred other topics of conversation, as well as other poets. But why didn't she say so? Surely she knew she had nothing to fear from former claimants to Papa's affections! She turned to Alec. "Go and wake Tzu Niu. Longfellow seems to have put him to sleep."

The punkah started with a jerk, and we waited expectantly for Alec to return. Papa tapped restlessly on the table. If there was anything he hated, it was for the family to be disrupted when a romantic mood was upon him. "Ralph, go find out what your brother has against us to remove himself from our company."

We grinned. We knew what was going on. Tzu Niu was an even better raconteur than punkah-puller, and Papa, whether he knew it or not, was up against stiff competition.

"Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing," Papa began again, the first start having proved abortive. "Yes, sir, you just should have seen those bays I hired for our wedding journey! Made the fifty miles into Winston-Salem from Mount Airy before dark!"

"What time was the wedding, for goodness sake?"

"Seven o'clock in the morning."

"Wouldn't you know it?" Celia nudged Gordon, who resented more than any of us being routed out in the wee hours before a trip.

"Remind me to take you to see that old Pilot Mountain when we go to America. Stuck with us most of the way, she did. We'd think we'd left her and then make another turn in the road and there she was again!"

"What about that? A mountain for a chaperon!" Gordon whispered to Celia.

Mary darted off to get the family albums. Mary was most easily impressed by family lore. One fat plush album was dedicated to our American kinfolk, the other to the British, and there was no question which was plusher. Papa's Dixie was definitely austere. Most of the photos were crudely done: tintypes, or fading pictures with dresses and lapels starkly outlined in black.

Papa turned to the page with the picture of his first family sedately posed near a parapet of some kind. Not at all like the second crop of Herrings! No one in his right mind would have posed us on or near a parapet—even a paper one!

"Did you ever have to yell at Manly to hurry up with the hammer?" Alec asked impishly.

"What's that in Margaret's arms? A stick dressed up?"

"Silly! Do you think little girls always had dolls with kid bodies and joints?"

"Ralph!" Mother gasped, catching sight of his hands on the album. "Go and wash those hands! The very idea!"

"But I'm through eating now, and besides, look at Gordon's!"

"Right now, both of you," she ordered sternly.

Propping the swinging door open so as not to miss anything, they proceeded to make much ado about nothing at the washstand in the butler's pantry. The pitcher was dry. Neither boy wanted to go to the well to fill it. In a ludicrous pantomime, they conspired to giving a good imitation of getting clean, sobering only when Mother's attention wandered their way. Ralph dropped the soap, they scuffled for the towel, then wiped together, mouthing silently to Alec, who was giggling enough to give them away.

"*Sa-tze ban gwah!* Crazy melon-heads!" Chen Tze-fu chortled. He enjoyed their pranks so long as they were not directed at him.

Back at the table, Gordon pointed in derision at the portrait of us taken in Shanghai the year we'd come to Chengchow. "Look at Celia. She must have been posing as the Cheshire cat!"

"You were scuffling too, only you got your face straight in time," Celia said. "Remember how Papa threatened to spank our posterity?"

"Papa, did you ever have to spank Manly's posterity?" Ralph giggled at his own cleverness. He was careful to keep his hands under the table out of Mother's sight.

"You should know better than to take your father's words too literally. He and Webster often disagree," Mother said.

But nobody bothered to look the word up at the time. When a guest, a few weeks later, concluded his lengthy prayers with the request that the Lord bless our posterity, Gordon exploded with a loud "haw!"

Mother was the last one to rise from her knees, and her face was very red. There was nothing but merriment in her eyes, however, and we felt that a victory of some kind had been achieved.

Mother's dislike of firearms hadn't modified in the years since she'd fired the gun on Tai Shan. Perhaps she had hangovers of guilt after the Boxer incident. But Papa didn't. He thought it possible to turn the other cheek too far—to make an about face, as it were, with disastrous results. He used to say, "Everyone should know how to *give* as well as *take*, and above all when to do which." He saw to it that we all learned the sportsman's rule about guns. "Never point it at anything you don't want to kill!" he warned us.

Once, a shot reverberated through the house, bringing Mother racing down to the front hall.

"You'll be the death of me yet!" she scolded, somehow including Papa in her indictment. Perhaps out of relief at finding everyone alive, she said little about the hole in the floor, or Gordon's carelessness.

Sometime later, however, she almost slid down the banisters (a feat we'd have enjoyed seeing) when she heard Ralph screaming in pain. Again she raced to the front hall. "Boys! boys! What will you do next?"

Ralph was lying on the floor. Gordon was looking in horror at a red-ink-stained cleaver lying beside the hole in the floor where Ralph's missing big toe was hiding impishly. The little act was a great success. Too great, as far as the boys were concerned. Falling to her knees, Mother suddenly checked the flow of her sympathy and ran an exploratory finger over the cleaver. She rose to her full height and her eyes smoldered.

"Just for that you'll learn—and recite to me—Hamlet's soliloquy. Before supper, mind you!"

Of the three horses that we owned over a period of years, Prince was the one that Papa loved most to ride. He wanted Mother to know the pleasure of such a mount, too. But as soon as she had mounted him, Prince dumped her over his head.

"Just let him know once for all that you're in control!" Papa insisted, as Mother dragged herself from the dust and rearranged her hairpins. "That's what I had to do, and he's fine, now."

Mother's eyes widened and her jaw line set as she tried to summon something within herself that Papa seemed to want.

"Quote Scripture at him, Mother," Ralph suggested. "That's what you do to us!"

But it didn't seem funny. Even Papa would have a hard time mending a broken neck. Mother had not been brought up to rebel, however. She mustered determination to do or die.

"You'd do better if you'd take my saddle instead of that ridiculous thing!"

"I always rode side-saddle in Australia."

"Well, the Lord never intended it. But perhaps it won't matter if you just put your mind to the job."

But Prince applied his mind first. Released by Tzu Niu, he lifted his hind quarters and eased Mother gently over his ears again.

Papa, helping Mother up, fronted Prince with an indignation even a horse should have understood. But it didn't do any good. With the third upset, Mother balked. "Three times is enough," she moaned, pressing her aching temples. "He's yours to control to your heart's content!"

As we learned about it, April Fool's Day was a strictly American invention. The whole thing was very strange to Mother, at any rate. Papa spoofed us, right and left, and stayed alert to foil our every attempt to trick *him*. Mother insisted on our adhering strictly to the truth. Not even

April Fool's Day gave us license to tamper with facts. Oh, we could couch our impertinences in such a way as to *suggest* a condition contrary to fact, but we could never come out with the real thing. Operating under such a handicap made one April-fool prank a memorable one to us. That was the time we actually managed to pull a hoax on Papa with Mother's help in the conniving.

The incident concerned Papa's motorcycle which he'd been able to buy, now that he was getting a real salary from the Board. Mother still wasn't convinced that Papa needed a motorcycle. She thought it a terrible risk to life and limb and a distraction to the Chinese, who were far more interested in the noisy contraption than in any tracts Papa might carry. He shrugged off Mother's lack of enthusiasm as feminine sophistry, but we could tell he had misgivings of his own. The petrol came in expensive five-gallon tins; parts were forever breaking, and replacements ordered from Montgomery Ward seldom fit. The deeply rutted roads were definitely not built for speed. Occasionally a pathway, newly started through the countryside, offered a better route, but farmers were inclined to resent the encroachment of a thoroughfare across their land and to react by digging ditches crosswise to trap the unwary. Once Papa had leaped an unexpected ditch only by pulling frantically upward on the handlebars at the last minute. He hadn't enjoyed the experience, but his Indian was still his pride and joy.

"Wheels stand for progress where I come from," he said. "And I'm all for progress, you know."

Mother was more for the kind that Bunyan wrote about, but she knew when she was outmaneuvered. The motorcycle and its assorted parts were granted housing in the smaller dining room just within the back service entry. Nothing was too good for that Indian! Chen Tze-fu's friends, making a tour of his domain, often peered into the room, pointing, and asking questions. They were always curious about every little detail of our lives.

On the memorable April Fool's Day in question, Ralph, having been carefully coached by Mother, sauntered casually into the study, where Papa was wrestling with mission accounts. He took a book from the shelf and leafed through it idly. "By the way, Papa, did you give permission for those Chinese to monkey with your motorcycle?"

Papa let out a roar and dashed through hall, dining room, butler's pantry, and kitchen to the back entry, where the rest of us had gathered with Mother to watch the fun. He rounded the corner on a full head of steam and braked to a skidding stop at our shout of "April fool!" His whole posture was like nothing so much as the still-rotating wheels of an overturned car. His grim expression subsided into a sheepish grin that stayed with him all day, off and on.

Again, we could tell what he was thinking. Now we were ready for America. The confines of a mission compound had not inhibited us unduly: we could not only take teasing, but dish it out as well.

CHAPTER 23

Half A World To Go

The year of the Lawton furlough found the Herrings enjoying Miss Goddard's more-or-less undivided attention and her assistance in getting us groomed for American schools. Miss Goddard was one of three teachers largely responsible for our education—the one who stayed with us for the longest period of time. (She had already left for her Christmas vacation at the time of our Shanghai exile.) She fronted the world with undented pompadour and bosom, in the fashion of current American magazines, but she had the soul of a poet. We always had the feeling that somewhere in her dim past she might have enjoyed pranks as much as we did. (Once we overheard Mother tactfully suggesting that she would do well to laugh less readily at Ralph's monkeyshines. Miss Goddard and our parents were definitely teamed for our edification.)

One day in the early spring of 1914, Miss Goddard took us to the pond by the south gate of the city for a lesson in science. Celia, Gordon, and Ralph were required to take notes, but the rest of us were free to catch tadpoles and gather buttercups. For a few moments we rested on the bank of the pond, not long enough to attract a crowd, however. It was a day of unbelievable clarity, with cumulus clouds racing overhead. Miss Goddard drew our attention to the even faster moving shadows rippling over the hovels and the few trees near grave mounds, scaling the uptilted roofs, and leaping the serrated walls of the city beyond. The effect was kaleidoscopic. As we watched, we felt as if we, too, were traveling.

"That's an illusion," she told us. "We *are* moving, but only in relation to the sun above us." Miss Goddard's pronouncements had a certain Presbyterian flavor—a dignity like that of the catechism. "You'll soon be going to America, and there it will seem that man—Western man, anyway—is moving rapidly toward some goal of perfection. The advance is more or less illusory—material rather than spiritual. Human nature is the same the world over. Keep that in mind."

"Would you rather live in China than in America?" Gordon asked.

"You ask me that after my trip to the Soong Tombs?" She grimaced. "Remember, I'm not blessed with a 'bitter skin.' Fleas *like* me!"

We laughed. Her account of the trip—taken during the recent China New Year holidays—had been almost as good as if we'd made the three-day journey ourselves. In some ways, better. Our eyes were too used to China scenes to feel the shocks that Westerners felt. But as she told it, we could almost see the great stone animals that had weathered the storms of centuries, and the windswept trees huddled against a bleak horizon. We could smell the filth of the inns and hear the clamor that invariably went with travel in China.

She clambered to her feet, and yellow petals fell about her high-buttoned shoes. "Don't forget how those stamens and pistils looked," she said brightly. And then, as if conscious of leaving Gordon's query in mid-air, she touched him playfully on the shoulder. "Just say it's not so important *where* you live, as *why*, and even flowers have some kind of purpose."

We were to think often of her observation in the days that followed. Even on the return to our own compound.

The smaller children, galloping ahead of the others, noted what seemed to be a man stripping leaves from a tree beside the road. There was nothing unusual about that. A closer look, however, showed that he was hanging by the neck. The cold horror of the sight took an endless moment to trickle down to us. We raced ahead to tell Papa.

He and Tzu Niu soon had the victim down, and he regained consciousness on our divan. The man had been robbed. Rather than return to his parents insolvent, and without face, he'd chosen to die. Over cups of tea, Papa tried gently to hearten him. He gave him a Gospel of John and money to tide him over the emergency. Papa sighed as he watched him leave. Who could tell how deep or shallow the gratitude behind the low bows? As for us, the nightmarish quality of what we'd seen stayed with us.

There were other horrors to which we'd grown more or less accustomed. Papa tried to shield us from most of them. Once when we were walking under the west gate he saw the gory heads of three bandits suspended above us in baskets. (Such a display was supposed to be a great crime deterrent.) Gordon saw the barbarity and blanched. Quickly Papa distracted the attention of the rest of us, so that we, at least, were spared the gruesome sight. But he couldn't keep from us the spectacle of beggars who crawled about displaying their deformities, or of parents (perhaps) who dragged half-dead children around to excite pity. Newcomers to the field invariably overreacted, sometimes retreating in revulsion. "Old China hands," as they called themselves, grew calloused to a certain extent. Papa cut his own pattern, trying at once to cover the shame of his fellow human beings and to hide the deeds of his right hand from his left in accordance with his interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount.

At night when the snow blew in from the north, he would send Tzu Niu down to the city gate where the beggars congregated. Perhaps they never knew whence came the huge pots of steaming millet, but Papa—having filled at least a few of China's empty stomachs—was able to sleep with his own conscience.

There was a different quality about walking in the valley of the shadow when it involved someone in our own home. Especially someone who was expending herself in our behalf nobly and without fanfare. Suddenly Miss Goddard came down with typhus fever. A young English doctor who'd been in the party visiting the tombs was also stricken. No one knew how the disease was transmitted; only that it was quick and deadly. Mother went into a sort of quarantine to nurse her. She came out of the sickroom at intervals and talked soberly with Papa, the width of the hallway between them.

One night Miss Goddard wanted us to sing for her "Saviour Breathe an Evening Blessing." We knew from Mother's eyes that things were serious. It was a difficult assignment, and our last from Miss Goddard. We lined up outside the sickroom in hushed solemnity. When one soprano quavered to a miserable stop, another carried on, but the effort was pathetic. Perhaps Miss Goddard never knew just how pathetic. Mother said she smiled gratefully.

Papa was careful to line and seal the coffin before the little service was held in our living room. He read the Scripture, and Mother had us sing "A Day's March Nearer Home." Later, Gordon was designated to carve a headstone. For weeks he chipped away furiously so that it would be finished before we left for our furlough. Mother was very proud of the even lettering. No one dreamed that Gordon's grave would be the next in the little new cemetery which the Baptists had bought near the Lawton compound.

Nor did anyone dream of the later developments on a world-wide scale of that year 1914. We were too much involved with the momentous fact of our impending furlough. At last, after thirteen years, Papa was going "home" to America again. And we with him, this time.

Now our chief topic of conversation at the breakfast table was the best route to take to America. Papa thought the Board would be as willing to permit him to use the travel allowance in one direction as in the other. But traveling westward across Siberia, Europe, and the Atlantic would involve stringent economies on the part of all of us. As our parents saw it, the route westward would have two advantages. First, traveling in the direction of the sun, we would avoid tangling with the international date line—something that confused Mother terribly. Second, we would accomplish a merging with Western civilization in accordance with its historical development: from Asia to Europe and thence to America.

Mother, especially, had a great respect for the movement of time. Incidents, as she saw them, were never unrelated therein. God's timepiece might move inexorably, but if our lives were "properly" dedicated, we could count on a heavenly synchronization. Just how proper that dedication had to be none of us knew. It was easier to take Mother's word for the matter than to find out for ourselves. Less time-consuming, too.

The permission Papa had sought from the Board finally came, and with it the appropriation, which Papa assured us could absolutely not be stretched any more than he had figured it. We were thoroughly convinced that any extravagances, such as an extra piece of chewing gum or stick of peppermint candy, would certainly land us in one of Bunyan's debtors' jails. All of us together, of course.

We never knew why Papa sprouted a beard some few weeks before our scheduled date of departure. But we had a strong suspicion that it had something to do with demonstrating to his fellows across the sea the maturity that he might have lacked before.

He hadn't announced his purpose the morning he came down to breakfast with a three-day growth of stubble. Mother raised her eyebrows but said nothing.

"Your Mother is more accomplished than most people," Papa said. "She can be silent in no less than seven languages!"

"Are you going to turn out your beard?" Alec asked.

Papa always made his own decisions, but that didn't mean our reactions were unimportant to him. He stroked his stubble affectionately. "The fact is, sometimes you just can't always tell, you know."

"You wouldn't dare!" Mother gasped. Prodded enough, she *would* express her opinion.

Papa's eyes danced. He liked meeting these ripples head-on.

"Oh, well," Gordon said. "We can always tell folks in America that there's a shortage of razors here. They won't know the difference!"

Ralph suggested that Papa grow his queue again, since he seemed to favor "hirsute appendages." A lively discussion followed as to whether it was *hir*-sute or *his*, until Papa rapped on the table with his up-ended knife handle.

"The Chinese'll like it because it's grey," Susie said.

"Grizzled," Gordon amended. "Never use a monosyllable where a polysyllable will do as well."

"Poly means *many*," Celia said. "Grizzled has only two syllables!"

Gordon shot her a look of scorn. Girls could be so stuffy!

In due time, the beard became a well-trimmed Vandyke, but none of us liked it—except Papa.

Late in March we left home, full of enthusiasm for our first stop, Peking. The ancient capital greeted us with a raw, bleak wind. We rode in rickshaws to see the Forbidden Palace, where only a decade earlier the Empress Dowager had lived out the age-old frustrations of dethroned monarchs.

Papa didn't like rickshaws for two reasons. He didn't relish the idea of another human acting as his pack horse, and he didn't like the inevitable haggling. But there was no other means of transportation speedy enough to get us around in the time allotted. Most of Peking seemed familiarly grey and overcrowded. But the delicately hand-painted panels lining the royal promenade in the Forbidden Palace, the fantastic imagery of the marble teahouse, and the filagree carvings at the Temple of Heaven seemed as remote from the China we'd known as life on the moon.

"Here is the circle that represents the center of the universe," our guide told us solemnly in Chinese.

We wished we could have entered the cold, barred structure, if only because barred rooms were in themselves challenging. But the Temple of Heaven wasn't for terrestrials, apparently.

The journey resumed, Papa gave us a briefing on our major transportation problem. "Everyone carries his own baggage," he decreed. "If you're careless, you'll just arrive in London with only the clothes on your back!"

But he reckoned without our being caught in the throes of train sickness on the trans-Siberian journey of eighteen dreary days. Along with other things, Papa's careful plans were discarded, and Papa and Gordon shifted the assortment of bags from train to train without much help from us.

Mother had included in our luggage a few books that would prepare us for London. Those who wanted to enjoy Dickens could stay in cabin number one. Those voting to play Panjandrum were in cabin number two. Cabin number two was considerably more littered than Mother's domain. There, Papa's growing stock of walking canes swung from the upper berth, and paper dolls and shoes littered the floor. Papa seemed to want a cane from every country we'd pass through.

First or second class, as far as we were concerned, meant an upper or a lower bunk. That was quite a distinction when it came to eating. Papa bought soup for our meals from vendors at the stations. It was good, hot, vegetable soup and easily sloshed. Those lucky enough to rate first class—and we took it by turns—at least failed to get a shower of hot lentils or beans. Mother called the soup container a "billy." The boys were forever quipping about a "billy full of soup," and Mother tried in vain to quell their lack of refinement.

Once, as a special treat, Papa took us into the station restaurant at Nizhni Novgorod, where the train was due to wait an hour.

Papa stretched his legs gratefully under the table. Mother and Celia pored through guidebooks for clues as to what to order. When our buxom waitress appeared, Papa signaled selections for all of us by pointing to neighboring diners and holding up two or three fingers. He meant by that to order duplicates or triplicates of the meals the neighboring diners were enjoying. Grinning widely, our waitress disappeared.

We swung our legs and nibbled at the hunks of hard brown bread that had been brought to the table. We had never seen bread cut by a cleaver before. Off in a corner of the room a man chopped away at the long, brown loaves. Celia thought the process looked gruesomely like that of the guillotine.

"Wonder what's keeping our waitress?" Papa grumbled.

"People are boarding the train," Mother said uneasily.

Papa turned to look but wasn't impressed. The fat conductor scraped his chair back from his table and came over to ours. He rumpled Alec's hair good-naturedly. He gestured with his fingers, one, two, and three. Papa thought he was counting children. He smiled and nodded. Russians were very friendly, and it wouldn't have surprised us if he'd bent down and kissed Papa on the cheek.

"Look!" Mother gasped. "That conductor meant three bells have sounded! The train's beginning to move!"

"Golly, I wonder what happened to that meal!" Alec said wistfully, as we scrambled back to our compartment. Mother began counting mouths. (Our parents had lived in China so long that they always counted mouths instead of heads. And Papa beckoned with the come-hither gesture of the East, down-handed.)

"Gordon!" Mother's voice rose to a wail. "Oh, he's left behind in the heart of Russia!"

Papa was frightened too, but he kept his head. He and the conductor raced to the rear of the train and found Gordon amusing a compartment of Russians by figuring rubles on a Chinese abacus. He was quite surprised at the parental concern he'd caused.

"Sometimes I wish Australians could travel with their young like the kangaroos do," Papa said when things got quiet again.

Mother looked at Papa as if nothing was impossible but Papa, and there wasn't a thing she would do about it, even if she could.

All of us had a ready answer for anyone who came up throwing Russian at us. What we said was Chinese for "I'm not afraid you'll curse yourself," but according to the guidebooks the sounds were supposed to mean "I don't understand your language." Apparently we offended no one by the message, however, for the questioner invariably smiled and went his way.

Once, while talking with a Chinese passenger, Papa learned of the predicament of a young Japanese scholar whose suitcase, containing all his credentials, had somehow gone astray. Unable to get his troubles across to the train officials, he wept and gestured in despair. The conductor spoke only Russian and French. By enlisting a Frenchman who spoke English, Papa and his Japanese-talking Chinese friend got the linguistic relay race launched. The student finally got his luggage back, and everybody shook hands warmly all around the circle.

Outside, the snowy landscape lurched by. Eighteen days of it. It was very monotonous. If there were interesting sights to see in St. Petersburg, we had neither the time nor the inclination to see them. It seems incredible that such was the case. But beyond noting the ridiculous hobble skirts and leashed French poodles of the ladies mincing by the hotel where we spent one night, our interest weltered in the train sickness that beset us again with the cessation of motion. Limp on our baggage, we watched as Papa wrestled verbally with customs officials and agents. The fetid air in the railway stations seemed to have been preserved for centuries. All our luggage was laid open to scrutiny. Belatedly, Papa caught on to the magic of a sizable tip, but he didn't like it. "I thought the infernal squeeze was a Chinese custom, only."

Aboard a boat that slipped through the locks of the Kiel Canal, Papa called us up from the cabin to enjoy the spick-and-span, doll-like quality of the bordering farms and villages. "You pull that nonsense about being sick here, and I'll throw you overboard!"

It didn't seem a good place to resume diving lessons. We decided to rally around, whether we felt like it or not.

There was a great deal of rallying ahead of us. We rallied on the street corners of London, amid the din of cabs and drays, to decide what sights we could afford to see. Cemeteries were free, and we must have wandered over half the cemeteries of London. One of Mother's English friends had given her the name of a landlady in a respectable neighborhood who would admit us, even though she clearly disapproved of children eating—if not of children altogether. We staggered in late in the evening with carefully disguised packages of buns and bananas. Before anyone could eat a mouthful, the floor had to be covered with wall-to-wall newspaper. It was a great bother, this new civilization to which we were being introduced.

In Westminster Abbey, Papa's interest flickered briefly over the ancient throne with its fabled Stone of Scone underpinning. He hurried us past the displays of royal finery. But at the simple slab marking Livingston's tomb, he called us all to attention. "Can't you see this is history?" he asked indignantly.

On the first Sunday morning, we were groomed to go to Spurgeon's tabernacle where a former classmate of Papa's was now pastor. We'd all been somewhat refurbished, although most of the clothes were either too large (to allow for growth) or slightly faded (but nice and warm, m'dear). Papa's suit had been chosen with more than usual care. At last he'd found a garment to wear with that beard. Or so he thought. We soon capitalized and personified the Frock Coat. In it, Papa planned to make a strategic appearance before his fellow Southern Baptists in an effort to heal the breach of former years. The importance of that we could very well see.

But we could also see our duty to keep Papa from taking the matter too seriously. None of us wanted any old Frock Coat to lure Papa out of character. Its sombre dignity began haunting every conversation like the ghost of Banquo. A major part of our strategy was to bring up the matter at the silliest times—as when Papa was deep in the intricacies of tipping in shillings and pence.

"Hey, Mother," Ralph would say, plucking at her arm. "Did you pack the Frock Coat?"

Or Gordon would stop short so that two or three of the smaller members of the procession piled up on top of the baggage he carried. "Who," he'd ask poignantly in tones of mock patience, "who has the Frock Coat?"

At which, Papa's harassed expression would break into a grin.

That Sunday, all very properly arrayed, we went back to greet Papa's old friend, Dr. A. C. Dixon. But Dr. Dixon didn't recognize Papa.

"Don't you know me? Dave Herring?"

"Why, you old mountain billy goat!" Dr. Dixon shouted. "Come out from behind those bushes!"

Fortunately, Papa had brought his razor to England. That afternoon he shed his beard without any further ado.

Our first automobile ride was through lovely April landscapes to Stratford—significantly enough for us who had grown up with Shakespeare, so to speak. Having cosily included so many of his phrases in our patter, we now found ourselves in a vaguely familiar England—much as if a well-remembered hand were pointing out her salient features. The flower-bordered walk under the thatched eaves of Ann Hathaway's cottage became a rallying point.

"This isn't as important as Shakespeare's home, itself," Papa said. "You three little ones can look at the flowers and watch the people. Besides, there won't be much to see."

How did he know? Susie gritted her teeth and took her stand beside the privileged older children. "I'm ten years old and that's old enough to remember," she said. *Miss seeing where Shakespeare had done his research on the joys of being "over boots in love?"* Not Susie.

She won her point, the little struggle actually heightening her interest. She peered into the huge fireplace, felt the rough texture of the walls, saw the bed—with ropes for springs, just like ours at home—where Ann had dreamed of her lover. Susie dared herself to forget a single detail.

In Birmingham we stayed a week with the Charles M. Alexanders. Mr. Alexander, happy singing partner of the Chapman-Alexander Gospel Team, had married the former Helen Cadbury of chocolate and Quaker fame. They had fallen in love with Mother and Mary on the Australian trip. Now they fell in love with Celia and begged to be allowed to give her an education in England.

"You have five others," Mrs. Alexander said. "You can spare one!"

But we chose to stick together. America had been our goal, and none of us was of a mind to change that, no matter how kind the offer made us here.

The final lap of our journey involved sailing aboard the S. S. *Cymric* from Liverpool to Boston. As if to welcome us to the fatherland, a flaming sunset drew our attention westward. We crowded the rail to catch a first glimpse of the emerging shore line of Massachusetts. The captain said we'd be docking in Boston by noon the next day.

Papa had been unusually quiet. Gone was the rollicking spirit of the adventurer. The blue eyes were filled with memories antedating us, and we respected his reserve.

"You're not having much to say," Mother said.

"A man of twenty-four doesn't look much like he did at the age of ten," Papa said. "Do you think we'll *know* George?"

"Of course!" Mother said. "He may be my stepson, but he's as much *ours* as the other children. Besides, it's not likely that anyone else will walk up to us and claim us as his family!"

"Look, Papa," Mary said. She displayed an Easter egg she'd been saving since London as a present for her brother, now a young intern, who'd been someone at the far end of a rainbow for so long that it was hard to believe he waited, real flesh and blood, only a matter of furlongs away.

Papa nodded absently. "Trouble is, it just doesn't seem like home any more. Not yet, anyway. Ma and Pa both gone, the old home burned, and the Gospel Mission issue a thing of the past." He cleared his throat. "I can't understand this—this unease. Sure, it will be good to have George with us, but in a matter of months we'll have to leave half the family again! Not much of a homecoming, that!"

Mother took his arm and they moved off to starboard as if needing to be alone. She knew the backwash of high emotional tensions. Even more, she knew the futility of "talking to the grief" of one who had walked in paths like those of the Psalmist of old. The wind brought back a snatch of her voice singing, softly, words that would have been lost to us had they not been so familiar. The hymn was Papa's favorite.

Majestic sweetness sits enthroned
Upon the Saviour's brow;
His head with radiant glories crowned,
His lips with grace o'erflow.

Celia, standing against the rail, her eyes on the brilliant sky, leaned her head against the grey tweed shoulder she thought was Papa's. "Lovely, isn't it?"

The silence became deafening.

Twisting suddenly, she saw her mistake and fled, her face scarlet. Gordon's laugh rippled across the deck.

In the morning we waited impatiently for the gangplank to be lowered. How strange it felt to be searching through crowds of strangers on the wharf below, looking for a brother we'd never seen! In spite of his letters, he hadn't seemed real. Celia could remember him dimly, but the rest of us knew you just didn't get brothers by mail.

"Thunderation!" Papa fretted. "They're as slow docking this boat as the Chinese would be."

But at last the crowd ebbed toward the gangplank, and Papa began counting mouths.

"Just a minute, sir." It was Celia's friend of the tweed shoulder. He grabbed Papa's hand and began pumping it, nodding toward Celia. "Please don't let her be embarrassed. For years I've wished I had a daughter, and I want you to know you're greatly to be envied." He blinked furiously, as if having trouble with his eyes, and slipped away in the crowd.

It was just the cumshaw Papa needed. He grabbed the baggage and started down the gangplank. "There he is," he shouted. "There he is! I'd know him anywhere!"

"But how did you know me?" George asked, as we stood amid the jostling crowd, feeling no longer alien.

"Anyone ever tell you you look like your father?" Papa asked proudly.

Had Papa ever looked so? Dark hair surged away from a Lincolnesque brow; a well-shaped Roman nose and full lips were given emphasis by a firm, cleft chin. The hairlines were the same, but Papa's locks were sparse and grey.

And who could tell what kind of lip hid behind that moustache?

Papa patted George's shoulder. "Never mind, son. You may still outgrow it!"

Mother's eyes glowed. Even if she'd provided only a few years of his training, she was enjoying a pride in this son, grown. What did it matter whether a few years or many? The relationship was the important thing. It seemed strange that this moment of arrival in America should bring the slightly divergent views of our parents into one understandable whole. Briefly. It was as if all at once we were looking through a stereoscope and found two views merging into a scene with the vivid quality of depth. However stern or warm the God of the Bible might seem to His children, the important thing for time or eternity was sonship. Nothing that might happen to any of God's children could ever be trivial or fail to have meaning.

An incident that occurred on the ferry between Boston and New York served to bear this out. Papa and the boys were in the men's quarters, and Mother and the girls were trying to get along without his help in the midst of distraught women, crying babies, scattered baggage, and harassed stewardesses. Tier upon tier of berths lined the walls. How could the passengers settle into these cubicles for sleep? We looked curiously about us. One lady sat on her baggage and stared disconsolately at the ceiling.

"How am I ever going to get courage to climb that high?" she wondered aloud.

Mother had a quick conference with Susie and Mary. "My girls don't mind changing with you," she said.

"You're from China?" the lady asked, later. "How strange! My daughter died in China only a few months ago. It has always seemed so far away! You wouldn't have known her, I suppose. Her name was Maude Goddard."

New York should have held a fascination for us, but by this time we'd had our fill of big cities. The wheels of the southbound train seemed geared to Papa's mounting enthusiasm. "Look at those pines!" he exulted as we sped through tidewater Virginia. "Just wait till you see the longleaf pines of Pender County!"

The towns grew smaller and smaller.

"Don't be dismayed if you get a few helpings of cold shoulder, Mrs. H. Some of the brethren haven't forgotten my Gospel Mission days, you know."

"Surely they're not holding that against you still?"

"A few will. To some folks down home, organizational disloyalty is just about the unpardonable sin."

Mother bridled. "Who do they think they are? Have any of them proved themselves any more loyal to the Lord than you?"

Papa was pleased at her faith in him but embarrassed to be long the subject of any conversation. "Well, anyway, now I've got a Frock Coat, and that'll cure my inferiority complexion, won't it, George? That's what you doctors think causes all the trouble, isn't it?"

George laughed in the funny rhythmic way we found terribly exciting. "Complex, not complexion, Papa." But it was hard to tell who was being kidded about what.

We stepped off the train into the warm sunlight of a

Sunday morning in May. The sign above the station house said, WARSAW, N. C.

"Still a few miles to go," Papa said brightly. "Not far!"

Not even *Uncle Remus* had prepared us for the somnolent stillness.

"Why are we going into this house?"

"It's a hotel," Mother said.

"With rocking chairs on the front porch?"

"S-sh," Mother whispered. "Better make your comments in Chinese."

But the natives weren't inhibited when it came to making remarks about us. "Got them slanty eyes like the Chinese, hain't they?" "Reckon iff'n Miss Mollie'd know'd you was comin' she'd a missed church to meet you."

Did all these strangers know who we were?

We boarded the "shoofly" and junketed on to a wide place in the road called Turkey. The village consisted of a few unpainted frame houses and a boarded up "sto' buildin'." A couple of Negro children rolled a barrel hoop in the fine sand of the road. It was the whitest sand we'd ever seen. But it seemed like the very end of civilization, too.

Papa hoisted Mother to the buggy of an accommodating neighbor and waved a companionable hand to a Negro, apparently granting him limitless privileges concerning the baggage. We gaped. Could Papa thus casually dismiss his concern for our luggage, a concern that had harassed his waking moments for so many weeks? This place must, indeed, be the ultimate!

Following Papa, we plunged into the woods on a path only dimly wheel-marked. The soft loam in the center of the path was loosened by horses' hooves. Papa was like one newly released from prison. Once he raised his voice in a Rebel yell. Then he sent the "coo-oo-ee" of the Australian bush rustling the pines.

"I hear a waterfall," Alec said unbelievingly.

"That's no waterfall. That's wind in the pines," Papa said.

His enthusiasm was contagious. Nowhere about us were small brown eyes peering at our every move. Here was room, plenty of room! Room to be yourself! Poor world that didn't have it!

Papa showed us the turpentine markings on the trees and explained how he'd caught the resin as a boy.

"Do they let logs lie on the ground and *rot?*" Susie asked. Waste like that we'd never seen in China.

It was two miles to Aunt Mollie's, but even so we arrived before she did. No one hurried through "preachin' " in those days. We explored the farm, pumping water gleefully and drinking in turns from the gourd, although Mother eyed it dubiously.

"Let's call up the hogs," Papa said, raising a lusty yell.

"I'll bet they understand Chinese better," Gordon said, when no sleepy grunts answered Papa's call. He put his hand over his mouth, beating out the Oriental call, which brought the hogs on the double, perhaps more from curiosity than anything else.

"She's got Larry in a trot for once in his life," Papa said, hearing the sound of buggy wheels crossing the bridge.

Uncle Claude handed Aunt Mollie down from the buggy, and she hugged us all. Her hands rested on Papa's shoulders. "Oh, Buddie!" she said, and her eyes, so like his own, were bright with tears. Now we were seeing for ourselves just what strong tides of affection and piety had washed across the sunny land of Papa's nativity.

CHAPTER 24

Model T For Trek

Papa had accepted Uncle Jimmie's invitation to spend the summer with him and his family on Masonboro Sound, near Wilmington. Uncle Jimmie was County Farm Agent for New Hanover County. He met us at the train and drove the six miles to his home on what seemed to us a perfect ribbon of macadam—something like the ad for a tooth paste, *comes out a ribbon, lies flat on the brush!* (We were assaulted by a terrible urge to read all the ads. They were so very cosy and in a language we could read, for a change. But they were exhausting: the colors loud and the claims overpowering.) The car turned off into a long lane between bright green fields of lettuce. We careened to left and right as the wheels followed the ruts. Imperfections like these were a lot more familiar than the smoothness of the highway.

At the end of the lane was a great sprawling house, with a friendly red tin roof and a screened veranda on the front and on the side facing the sound. The sun shimmered on the water. Aunt Eva and six more Herrings—all blond—flocked to greet us under the huge mulberry trees of the front yard. A litter of pigs penned not too far from the house added their squeals to the excitement. Margaret, thirteen, slightly older than Susie, introduced the girls to the niceties of farm life: the creaky swing (for courtin'), the pump on the back porch, and the outhouse behind the fig trees. *That* seemed a funny place to exchange confidences about favorite colors, games, boys' names, and such, but information *about* the outhouse figured in any adequate welcome—as we were to discover later.

That summer will always stand in our memories as a testimony to Aunt Eva's fortitude. She couldn't have guessed what she was in for—surely she wasn't *that* brave. But she could count. Twelve children, not including George, who was no child by now, of course. (On second thought, perhaps she'd had little to say in the matter. Uncle Jimmie was like Papa. Perhaps both of them just took co-operation for granted.) All day long—after chores—we trailed sand and water through the back entry and wide halls. Most of the time there were at least four more cousins from town, or from Aunt Ethel's house a mile down the road.

Aunt Eva's method of handling her children was nothing like Mother's; not nearly so inhibiting—to the children, that is. Uncle Jimmie left instructions each morning for James and our boys to help the tenants somewhere about the farm. But James liked to sleep late. It took Aunt Eva at least six trips up the stairs to rout him from bed. Always there was a great deal of groaning and giggling, a large audience being most stimulating to

James's wit. Mother didn't say anything, but we knew what she thought. The permissive methods of these Americans were much inferior to those *she'd* used.

A frequent visitor in the home of our cousins was a gangling youth by the name of Kenyon Woody. He gave the impression of being completely rootless. All we knew of him was that his mother traveled, and his summers were spent with an aunt on a neighboring farm. No one pestered *him* with chores. Between mouthfuls of Aunt Eva's biscuits, he talked about his "crate," the plane he kept on one of the nearby beaches. The terms he used skittered like stones skimmed across the water: *struts, flippers, deadsticks, gunning*. Mother thought he might be courting one of the cousins, but Papa said he was too interested in planes to court anything else.

Mother took Gordon and Ralph aside. "That boy's sure to kill himself!" she warned. "Don't you boys let him tempt you up in that—that thing! If the Lord had intended us to fly he'd have given us wings!"

"Perhaps he *has*," Gordon said. "Kenyon says America's really going places now!"

Mother shook her head. "The point is, *where?* I've said it before, and I say it again: this may be the home of the brave, but *brash* seems like a better word to me!"

When Aunt Mollie came to family reunions, her method of getting the younger generation to conform was to give us examples to emulate. Aunt Mollie had no children of her own, but she seemed to know by name, and intimately, a great many youthful paragons in her neighborhood who never wasted time reading novels, or quarreling, or lying abed after six A.M. Even Addison, Aunt Ethel's four-year-old, knew well the power of Aunt Mollie's innuendo.

"All of you bow your heads now, and Addison, you ask the blessing," she said to the second table of hungry youngsters.

"God is great, God is good. Let us thank him for this food," Addison chanted obediently. "And please, Lord, make us all as good as the people in Sampson and Pender counties. Amen!"

Merging into Papa's family was easy compared with other phases of life in America. Our aunts, uncles, and cousins could be counted on to hide from a curious world the inadequacies of our culture as opposed to theirs. They taught us to *eat* our ice cream cones instead of saving them. They showed us that "fat" chips were resinous, not round. At the table we learned why hot bread wasn't made for cutting, but for breaking; why forks looked better passed from hand to hand than loaded back-sidedly and lifted left-handedly aloft. All this was done so casually and kindly that we couldn't take offense.

But life outside the home was a different matter. Sometimes it had all the hot embarrassment of disrobing in a spotlight. There was the matter of Papa's blithe acceptance of every invitation, for instance. Mother wished we could tell—as we could with the Chinese—whether an invitation was meant to be accepted.

"Shucks!" Papa said. "Nobody would be fool enough to give an invitation if it wasn't meant for all of us!" Apparently you all meant you *all*.

In one well-to-do home in a city upstate, we found ourselves the embarrassed subject of a whispered conference between our hostess and her butler. Our host excused himself to get something at the drugstore—apparently thinking Papa wouldn't approve of buying ice cream on Sunday. But we saw no lack in the meal set before us later. The roast was small, but there were plenty of canned peas and *mountains* of ice cream. Padding a meal like that was something we were used to—not with ice cream, however.

Amazingly enough, the largest welcomes often came from the smallest dwellings. Papa was known and loved by folks all over eastern North Carolina. He and Aunt Ethel knew everybody's lineage and usually traced a kinship that accounted in a measure for the curiosity of our hosts. But we found the prying difficult to take. Like the current styles in dress, the questions were boringly repetitious.

Did we have watermelon in China? Were there any little—ha! ha!—sweethearts that we'd left overseas? How did we like this great country with all its modern conveniences? Didn't it feel good not to be listening to all that heathen jabber? Weren't we scared to cross that big old ocean in a boat? If we could *just* have answered the questions once for all!

"I'm going to stick out my tongue at the next person that asks me to 'talk in China!'" Ralph vowed. But of course he didn't. Not even children from a heathen land could bite the hands that fed them.

As for the monotony of styles, perhaps if we'd been so accoutered ourselves, we would have felt no stigma. As it was, the tilt of our hats, like the sound of our syllables, attracted attention where we least wanted it. Celia's hat—

proudly bought in London because Papa liked the way the soft rose underfacing enhanced her coloring—was of simple line, and large. Too large. The other hats we saw, Sunday after Sunday, were all of a size and shape. Each brim was coyly upturned, with a large cluster of flowers—predominantly lavender that year—perched on the upturned portion, and each almost invariably shadowed the *right* eyebrow.

In the cool nights of spring, we were often bedded down—never was the verb more apt—in the guest rooms of a half-dozen farmhouses. (Not many homes were large enough to accommodate all the family at once.) When we were courteously shown to our rooms, the beds all looked most inviting. Our problem was to get them to look that way again. All that pummeling, poofing, smoothing, lifting, and fluffing—what a chore, just to have a place to lie on! But at least they were novel. You couldn't get a featherbed to look the same two days in succession, to save your neck.

"I'm tired of smiling!" Susie protested once, when a new missionary journey loomed. "Let me stay here with Margaret."

"But you've got to remember all this hospitality means folks are showing an interest in missions. You're in favor of that, aren't you?" Papa said. A compassionate gleam in his eye betrayed the fact that, even for him, the comforts of furlough were more exhausting than the rigors of life on the mission field. A few more weeks of nomad living convinced Papa of the wisdom of buying a Ford. With that, he could meet his appointments without uprooting the family too drastically. What did it matter if cars were not standard equipment for missionaries in 1914?

Papa, Uncle Jimmie, and the boys circled the new Ford proudly the day Papa drove it to a chugging halt under the mulberry trees.

"That brass front is just the thing you need, whenever you're tempted toward timidity," Uncle Jimmie said, grinning. "Everything you stand for is bound to be accepted, now. There's no need for a made-in-America label with *that* to drive around in!"

Papa laughed. "Think folks will like it better than they did my queue, eh?"

"Bound to," Uncle Jimmie said.

"Is that your father's car?" Mary was asked at church the following Sunday.

"It will be when it's paid for," Mary chirruped. It was great to be so thoroughly American.

Opposition, or even indifference, to Papa's message was seldom encountered. Everybody seemed to have known Papa since his childhood. He was accepted, and with him, his message.

One exception was a certain red-headed man, the father of Amaryllis. Amaryllis had asked Susie and Mary to spend the day with her in Wilmington. Amaryllis was lots of fun, but at the table her father seemed more than usually quizzical: We'd lived pretty well in China, hadn't we? A ten-room brick? Lots of people would give their eye teeth to have had the privilege of traveling around the world as we had, eh? How many servants did our mother have helping her? Oh, really? How interesting!

When every answer caused him to glance triumphantly at his wife, we sized up the situation. Here was one Baptist who wasn't giving his money to missions!

"You needn't have laid it on quite so thick," Mary protested later. "After all, he doesn't know that houses of wood are out of the question in China."

Susie sniffed. "Huh! Who does he think he is? Besides, I don't think the Lord needs his money anyway!"

Sleeping late on Sunday mornings was an American custom we didn't discover for years.

"Do we need to get there in time to sweep out the church?" Gordon sputtered one Sunday morning. He much preferred life on the sound.

"We've got to allow for flat tires. You know that!" Papa's spirits were as blithe as the sunrise.

"One thing worries me," he admitted to Mother as he found his bearings and headed westward out of Wilmington. "That bank on the far side of Long Creek may be hard to pull after last night's rain. The sand will be heavy on the wheels. I wish Pender County had roads like these in New Hanover!"

"Why can't we cross that bridge when we get to it?" Mother said, stroking Mary's hair absent-mindedly.

"Only thing, there's no bridge."

"No bridge?" Mother's voice rose in alarm.

"I know what I'll do," Papa said. "If I take the creek with good momentum, I should be able to climb that hill all right. That's what I used to do with old Maud."

Which should have been a good idea, but for the fact that the initial plunge drowned out the engine and left the Herrings in midstream. The boys took off their shoes and stockings and pushed nobly. (In those days, boys' pants were knee length until boys became men.)

"There's no help for it. Everybody out!" Papa ordered.

"Me, too?" For once, Mother was forgetting her grammar.

"Unless you'll drive," Papa said. But Mother had no such intention. She, too, shucked out of her hosiery.

Standing on the bank, holding her skirts ankle-high and dangling her shoes by their laces, Mother watched us heave. She didn't have much hope of our liberating Lizzie, but she wasn't sure she wanted help to come along the road and find us in such a predicament. We pushed and rocked the stalled machine while Papa frantically maneuvered the spark, choke, and throttle. No go. Gordon lifted the hood—both pieces—and dabbed here and there with his handkerchief while Papa gave hopeful suggestions.

"With wings like that, she ought to fly," Mother said. It was a good sign when Mother began to tease.

Suddenly the motor caught with a cough and splutter. Papa engaged the clutch. The car lurched forward, leaving us nothing to lean on. The front of Celia's dress scooped a quart of water. Ralph managed a leap to the running board and hung on while Papa chugged triumphantly up the hill. The two of them whooped with laughter, watching our bedraggled ascent.

"As if climbing that hill barefooted wasn't bad enough," Mother scolded as we drove home. "Did you have to *tell* folks about it?"

"Oh, they enjoyed it as much as I did," Papa said.

George's head emerged from behind two intervening juniors. "Remember how shocked you were at the thought of people going barefooted? And Papa said we didn't go that way to church?" George grinned, spacing his words in the leisurely way we thought delightful. "You might as well start the fashion as anyone, I'd say!"

In September, on one of his journeys upstate, Papa rented a home for us in Buies' Creek, forty miles south of Raleigh. A Baptist school established there by a red-headed Scotsman—one J. A. Campbell—had been unusually successful in awaking interest in education among the farm lads thereabout. Papa thought it a good place for us. He bought a cow, an ice-cream freezer, and a piano; then returned to Wilmington to get us.

Joyfully we anticipated putting roots down again. The house was much like those of our neighbors on the three straggling streets of the village: gingerbread trimmings on the front porch; a long hall running through to the back porch where the pump stood; still further to the rear a chicken yard; and, last of all, the outhouse. Everything in the village centered about the red brick school building with its ding-donging call to plain living and high thinking.

The first day of school found Ralph and Susie assigned desks in Professor Marshbank's room. Ralph soon let Susie know that she was to fend for herself. Before noon she raised her hand to be excused. She tiptoed down the echoing hall and peered across the yard from the door, left to right. There it was. Not plainly marked as were the comfort stations of London, but much better than the Chinese *mao fong*. She looked on the door for a bolt or hook, but there was none. *Wonder why they're called privies?* she thought. *A spirit door, but not much privacy, here!*

Just as she stepped out, she almost collided with a tall, sunburned young man. He stood aside courteously to let her pass. She threw one startled glance upward, and his features etched themselves in her mind. Her own face flamed. She fled. The windows of the building were a glazed blur of reflected sky and clouds. Inside the school again, she was grateful that the hall was deserted. Her heart thumped. What had she done? Would she *ever* live this down? What must that young man be thinking of her? She leaned against the wall and felt it cool against her shoulder. Behind her a door slammed. Somebody was whistling "Yankee Doodle," his footsteps timed briskly. Soon he would round the corner and see her cowering there. She *had* to go back into that classroom. In one desperate motion, she flung the door open, then, head high, and miraculously without stumbling, she made it back to her desk. Once there, she buried her head in the geography book. Her only hope was that no one *else* had seen her.

All through the race home for lunch, through the gentle questions from Mother about how she had fared, Susie's confusion mounted. But she gave no sign of the turmoil within her. That afternoon her gaze wandered about the room, timidly. No use to let anyone sense her muddlement if there was a chance of not having been seen. In the far corner of the room two girls were at the blackboard. One would write a word and erase it quickly, then write another. They were obviously not studying lessons. Susie could read as fast as the girl could write. Again her face flamed. Now her disgrace would be all over school! She bit her lips. *No crying here,* she muttered to herself grimly. Feverishly she set herself to writing—anything to still the trembling within her. "The quality of mercy is not strained," she wrote, "The quality . . ." over and over again.

When at last the day was over, she scurried home. She left her books on the porch and made her way between the hydrangea bushes that separated the front yard from the back. She must find Papa. This was the kind of thing that only Papa would understand. He knew what it was to feel grubby, too. Papa was milking. Susie sat on a clump of grass and listened to the fine threads of sound as the milk streamed into the bucket. Thin and whiney at first, then softer and richer as the foam rose in the pail. Susie didn't mind the smell of cows at all. She rather liked it.

Papa finished, covered the pail with clean cheesecloth, hung up the milking stool, and proffered his free hand. Susie's fingers relaxed in his. "What is it?" he asked, finally.

Between sobs, the story came out. Papa moved away from the house so no one would be curious. "Why didn't you ask one of the girls?" he asked gently.

Numbly, Susie wondered the same thing. Why didn't she? What had she been afraid of? Why didn't she remember how Papa had always charged us not to be afraid lest a greater fear should come upon us, like the man whose house was swept clean of demons? A stirring of wind shook acorns from the tree above them, plop, plop, plop. Susie loved the warm brown smoothness of the acorns and the tight-fitting rough hoods, each acorn snug in its own pocket, as it were. She sighed. At least the ordeal was nine-tenths behind her. She was the same girl she'd been before.

Papa set down the bucket and pulled out a handkerchief. "Blow!" he said. Susie was much too big to have him blow her nose, but the act made her smile. Papa always knew how to help you face the world again. "Remember this, Susie," he said. "Those girls in your room should have showed you the way around, but even if people sometimes let you down, you *have* to believe in them. You *have* to trust your friends."

(Years later, at a literary forum, when Susie shook hands with Paul Green, the playwright, still sunburned and tall, he said he *did* remember her. "Let's see, your brothers were Gordon and Ralph, weren't they?" If he remembered the incident at the outhouse, there was no indication—no mockery in his eyes. His expression was warm and courteous. *What a blight fears—even childhood fears—put on things if allowed to grow,* Susie thought. She was sorry for everyone who didn't have a Papa.)

In our meanderings of 1914 and '15, we often found ourselves groping through spiritual quagmires of our own making, or splashing through shallows even more ludicrous than anything we'd known in China. Sometimes we rode on plateaus where the views were wonderful. Slowly we were getting the feeling of the terrain. America would never again be a blob of color in the blue sea of a geography book, a figment of some author's imagination. In the safety of this great land, who could dream of the scope of the troubles reported in the *News and Observer* of Raleigh? Why be troubled about some assassination in Serbia? None of our cousins were. Any place outside of the States was far away and of small consequence. Even China, *now*.

The day Mother discovered lice in our heads, she was ready to return to China. Immediately. She wrung her hands. "This I looked for constantly in China, but not *here*," she wailed.

We didn't feel disgraced. Other children had them. Mrs. Wiggs told us to dunk our heads in kerosene. "It works ever' time!" she said complacently. Mrs. Wiggs was a neighbor, who seemed to be an authority on everything.

One phase of life in America was downright amazing. Even with her multiplied duties, Mother seemed closer to us, somehow. Her hands, busy with broom, saucepans, ironing, and dishes, had never seemed so touchable—as if the gap of years meant little here. She laughed more readily, noticed our shortcomings less. In China, so many needy souls had claimed her attention. Wives of opium addicts, daughters-in-law with impossible home problems, heart-sick missionaries all found their way to Mother, and her door would close behind them as she took their troubles to the Lord in prayer. We were glad our present neighbors were more self-reliant. Anyway, lice seemed less of a problem than the sins that so easily beset those overburdened people in China.

Mother helped us dunk our heads every night.

Finally, the boys rebelled. "I'm not going to school any more smelling like a blooming lamp!" Ralph said.

"Somebody might strike a match and we'd explode!" Gordon said.

Mother giggled. She changed to fresh-egg shampoos.

"Now I can't look a hen in the face!" Gordon grumbled.

Whether it was the egg shortage or Mrs. Wiggs's cheerful example, we never knew, but Mother suddenly decided to invest in a hen and biddies. Papa shook his head in amazement. "All you have to do, and you take on *that?*" he said.

Again Mrs. Wiggs was most helpful. The more helpless Mother looked, the more Mrs. Wiggs rose to the occasion. It began to seem as if we'd have to take her back to China with us.

"Kerosene will kill those mites on that hen," Mrs. Wiggs said.

"Do you really think so?" Mother said.

"Sure's shootin'," her informant told her. "And if'n you don't do somethin', the biddies'll all die, too!"

Remembering the success of the treatment on her own brood, Mother dunked the hen as tenderly as she could and waited for her to dry before putting her back in the broody pen. But the hen up and died.

Again, Mother wrung her hands. "I'm no better than Lady Macbeth," she said.

Mrs. Wiggs brought over one of her own broody hens to serve as foster mother, but the hen wasn't *that* broody.

"Oh dear! She'll kill them all, stamping about like that!" Mother groaned.

"Oh, well, iff'n it don't work, we can rig up an incubator with a light bulb," Mrs. Wiggs said. She never ran out of advice. "Might have to stay up nights for a while; cain't all of 'em live, nohow!"

Mother excused herself, her expression still distraught. She said something about wishing she'd thought of prayer before. Mrs. Wiggs looked about and shrugged. "I've got beans cookin'," she said to no one in particular. "I'd better go."

The hen, having no audience to impress, must have decided to act more in accord with her instincts. At any rate, when Mother returned, the squawks had subsided and the little family's future looked assured.

"I knew the Lord would do it," she said triumphantly to Papa. "If He notices sparrows, wouldn't He give chickens His attention too?"

Papa grinned. "Sounds logical to me," he said.

Mother's theology defied the labeling that some people tried to apply. She was thoroughly Baptist, yet lacked nothing of Episcopalian piety. Sometimes she showed Presbyterian tendencies, and again a stoic sort of faith that has come to be associated with Christian Science. And of course she never forgot her father's Moravian zeal that had brought him originally to Australia as a missionary. Perhaps because of her diverse background, she felt free to voice her convictions, and one of them was that Baptist gatherings were deplorably secular. Her experience at church business sessions and associational meetings had prepared her to expect almost anything at the long-anticipated Baptist State Convention in Raleigh.

As Papa parked the Ford on one of the oak-bordered streets of Raleigh, we smiled to see the set of Mother's chin. She was bracing herself for the unexpected. Mr. and Mrs. Logan, missionaries to the Argentine, were also vitally interested in matters to be decided among the brethren. We met and had dinner together in the old Yarborough Hotel. Papa was unusually quiet. It had been a long time since he'd faced the constituency. He wanted to give a good account of himself.

A preacher friend stopped by the table and left a program of the evening session. Mr. Logan and Papa stood to greet their friend, resuming their seats to face us brightly.

Suddenly Papa jerked to attention. "Will you look at that?" he fumed. "Thirty minutes for ten missionaries? Three minutes to tell about fourteen years in China! It's an outrage!"

"Calm yourself, David," Mother said. "You know people want to hear you."

"Then why don't they rise up and demand a hearing for their missionaries? Look at that!" He waved the program in her face. "Every secretary, vice-president, and treasurer of forty-'leven different organizations! Reports from every by-pu in the land. (Papa used the acronym for Baptist Young People's Union with no little scorn. Having reared us without benefit of young people's organizations, he could see little need for them.)

"I don't blame you," Mr. Logan said. "This means I'll have to cut my speech to almost nothing. And I've been on the field only seven years!"

Papa stood up and looked around fiercely for the waiter.

"Let's get on over to the church. This makes my blood boil!"

In the lobby, Mother laid a hand on Papa's arm. "This is the prime reason for the Frock Coat, remember?" She noticed that one side of his stiff white collar had sprung its moorings. "Hold still," she said. "How can I get this right if you won't quit your pacing?" She worked the button into its hole and smoothed the satiny lapels proudly. A smile creased Papa's face, slowly. Evidently a resolve was growing deep within him. But his eyes were still grim.

All the way up Fayetteville Street and across the shadowed square of the Capitol, we pressed against a cold head wind. The November night held a hint of sleet to come. Nobody had much to say. People were gathering from every direction. Most of them were preachers. Some we'd met in our travels over Eastern North Carolina. They raised their homburgs and greeted each other cordially. The ladies herded the children before them, hesitating at the curbs where the lighting was poor. Papa left us and made his way to the rear of the building, where the speakers were to gather.

We sat in the warmth of the arched building and watched the auditorium fill with people. A rustle of excitement agitated the galleries. We looked at Mother. Was it *wrong* for us to feel this tingling in our spines? This was Papa's big night. No matter how he was received in his own country, he'd be honored by *us*, at least. Perhaps he could feel us urging him on. What he'd do was anybody's guess. But he'd do something, and, whatever it was, it would be exciting. One thing we could be sure of:

he'd act in accordance with his convictions. Like all Baptists, Papa could be counted on to say what he thought.

The speakers filed onto the platform. The knee-length folds of the frock coat made Papa seem even taller than he was. Across the sea of heads we could read the expression on his face. He'd found some kind of solution to his problem.

"Oh, dear," Mother whispered to Gordon. "I do wonder what he has up his sleeve!"

"Mother, you always tell *me* not to bite my fingernails," Celia reminded her, leaning across two intervening juniors.

"*Bu yao jin* (never mind)," Ralph said. "If you have to get personal, say it in Chinese!"

"Well, there isn't a churchyard here, and I doubt if he'd take it to the square," Gordon said. All of us remembered hearing about the sermon in the churchyard.

"See if you can catch his eye," Mother suggested. A shake of her head might make him think twice before saying anything rash.

"Shucks, let's have a debate," Ralph said. "That would be exciting. Remember those soap boxes in Hyde Park?"

"Don't be silly." Mother's voice was sharp with anxiety. "They thought him a demagogue before. . . ."

"What's a dem—?"

"Sh-h-h!" The first speaker was being announced.

We all suffered with him as he tried desperately to gather up the pieces of his carefully prepared report, hoping, apparently, to salvage the most important parts of the shattered whole. This could be what would soon happen to Papa.

Mrs. Logan caught Mother's eye across the auditorium and smiled, but we could tell she was tense, too.

The second speaker fared little better, though he took twenty minutes.

Then it was Papa's turn. He stepped up to the lecturn, looked over the faces before him, and spoke.

"Mrs. Herring and I have waited for this moment for fourteen years. We've traveled halfway round the world . . . ."

He paused, and the noise of the auditorium ebbed. Every eye was focused on Papa. Why? We knew he could never be called a "great preacher" in the awed tones usually reserved for those so designated. There was nothing dramatic about his delivery. But suddenly we didn't feel alone among strangers. How we knew it we couldn't say, but all at once everyone seemed to be sharing our concern.

"But," he continued, "it's obvious to all of us that I can't even get started telling you about China in the three minutes allotted to me." Here he half-turned in a graceful gesture to Mr. Logan, who was to follow him. "The only thing I know to do is to yield my three minutes to Brother Logan, hoping he can do more in six minutes than either of us could in three."

With that, he turned and walked back to his seat on the platform.

As a missionary speech this was certainly an innovation. All over the building, delegates clamored for the floor.

"I move our missionaries be given a decent hearing."

"Give each one thirty minutes!"

"What about the business to be transacted?"

"Business be hanged!"

The clamor, good-natured but insistent, died down only after a roaring voice vote gave the whole evening to the missionaries.

After all, according to the program, it *was* their night.

CHAPTER 25

The Lady And the Pirates

The approaching separation of the family loomed far more ominously on our horizon than did the war clouds of Europe. You could see Mother bracing herself. Papa tried to convince her that silver cords were for breaking; that the children were getting to the age when it was *right* for them to be on their own.

"Yes, but leaving four at once—" Mother's voice broke.

For all his brave front, Papa couldn't hide his own pain. He took the boys on long hunting trips whenever he could, only to realize bafflingly that here was another memory to clip off like some bleeding artery.

Celia was plainly excited over the prospect of entering Meredith College. Boy friends were as much trophies of the year at Buies' Creek as her diploma and the honors of graduation. There were joys outside the covers of books that China couldn't furnish. Gordon was quieter, but you could see his pride in following Papa's footsteps to Wake Forest. As for Ralph, still in short pants and treble of voice, hadn't he always pressed to keep up with the older two?

Only Susie refused to accept the present assignment. The division of the family in the past had put her with Alec and Mary. It seemed a poor time to change the pattern. She cried herself to sleep every night.

"Susie, you'll love it over here, once you get used to the idea," George told her. "There are so many more places to go and things to do. China's awful lonesome and far away!"

But Susie thought it all depended on your viewpoint. Nobody had convinced her that this land of bustling progress was *home*. Here was where you felt far away and lonesome.

Perhaps Mother's scepticism percolated through to us. America might be the land of promise, but it flowed with a lot more than milk and honey; so Mother felt. "I don't believe the child's grown a fraction of an inch this whole year," she said to Papa. "She may go into a decline." Mother's prognoses always had a faintly Victorian flavor.

"You want to risk dropping behind in your lessons?" Papa asked Susie.

She nodded mutely, but firmly. Yes, she was willing to risk anything, anything at all to avoid the bleak homelessness that faced her.

Papa stroked his moustache. Children of missionaries were often overprotected. Didn't she need the give-and-take of a democracy? She'd get over her homesickness, but where would her timidity lead her? So often, like a startled deer in the woods, she'd be off to some leafy seclusion of her own. Perhaps Mother was right.

By August, Papa had decided to let Susie return to China along with Alec and Mary.

When the time of leave-taking actually arrived, Mother was the calmest of us all. She had written a message to each of the older trio, Celia, Gordon, and Ralph, and left the letters in their Bibles to be found in the privacy of their own devotions.

> I can't sleep tonight, and I'm writing this by moonlight. I stood for a long time beside you as you slept and prayed for you. There, God gave me a promise from Isaiah: *I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day*. That's God's promise to me and I know He'll keep it.

An ocean or two might separate us physically, but Mother admitted no such separation spiritually.

No one had any idea, apparently, that the troubles in Europe would cross the Atlantic and grow into World War I. Even when a fire broke out in the hold of the British S.S. *Monteagle* the night before we were to sail from Vancouver, the rumors of sabotage were dismissed as insignificant. And that was about the closest we came to the conflict; for the young Chinese Republic to which we returned was too busy trying to emulate the example of the States to offer much help or interference abroad. Actually, the decade that followed was, perhaps, the least turbulent period of the forty-two years Papa spent in China.

"Three children make a lot less noise than six," Papa said. "I never dreamed I'd miss them so!"

"We left two of the noisy ones," Mother reminded him. "Aren't you glad, now, that you brought Susie back with us?"

For the first year after our return, it fell to Papa's lot to steer Susie through her algebra and Latin. These were subjects that Mother had never formally taken, although she knew the principal parts of most of the verbs, just from the Australian method of learning English and digging into the roots of the language. Susie and Papa, therefore, floundered through *Caesar's Gallic Wars* without much help from her. Susie saw that Papa's mind often strayed from the matter at hand. He seemed to miss Ralph more than any of the other children.

It wasn't that Papa played favorites: he had a way of making us feel that each was his favorite. It was just that Ralph hadn't minded making a nuisance of himself by butting into every conversation, tagging along on hunting expeditions and trips to the market, and concerning himself with current issues, no matter how dry and adult they might have seemed.

Quae cum ita sint, as Caesar was eternally saying, Susie had to plan her own strategy. She'd make herself a place in Papa's affections just as Ralph had. Whenever Papa took a walk, she'd grab the hand without a cane. They talked of the discouraging features of Chinese politics, of why Southerners in America always voted Democratic, or of what Papa considered the worst current misconception of missions in the American press. (Years later, Susie confessed to the deliberate campaign. Papa said, "You rascal! You made me miss you worse than anyone when you had to leave, too.")

Sometimes the discussions were theological. Mother believed in premillennialism, and she often tried to convince Papa. Papa was well convinced as to Mother's spiritual perceptiveness, but he took slowly to anything as complicated as the sequence of events mapped out for the universe under such a plan. Nothing like that had been taught in the seminary he'd attended.

"It looks like a pessimistic outlook to me," Papa complained. "Wouldn't you be discounting all the progress of the Western world where Christianity predominates? Your contention that things are to grow worse and worse all the time until the Lord returns to set up His Kingdom makes the Gospel seem so—so ineffective! Sure, I know it'll be a long time before China—"

"Nonsense!" Mother said. "There's a difference between technological and spiritual progress. We've got to be realistic. How can you square the world's continual turmoil with the wishful thinking that one fine day the whole of humanity is suddenly going to do an about face and everyone is going to treat his fellow humans as he should?" Mother bolstered her argument with Scripture. "*In the world ye shall have tribulation*, so the Lord told us. Besides, just suppose that practically everybody is converted. Among the small remnant there is bound to be at least one power-mad dictator!"

Papa swung his cane thoughtfully. He needed no cane for walking: only for stray curs and other things such as highly controversial issues. He always made a high arc and thrust the tip purposefully into the earth just beside his right foot. In the matter under discussion, he refused to be cornered. "Just say, the whole thing is sorter out of my province," he said, grinning.

The following year Susie entered the boarding school built on Ki Kung Shan. A twelve-graded affair, it had been established for the two-score or more children of Lutheran missions and did a creditable job of preparing its pupils for entrance to St. Olaf's College in Northfield, Minnesota. But at first, Susie bogged down in her Latin, and again the tears flowed. Papa made a special trip to the mountain to arrange for her to study with an older, more proficient scholar. Susie was thrilled that he thought the matter worthy of his attention—important enough to justify the long train trip. What wouldn't she do for Papa!

As soon as she felt herself an equal among equals, she adjusted.

But when Mother thought he should exercise his tact on a certain individual in the mission who was having difficulty stomaching a lady dictator in the same field, Papa balked. He made one attempt and decided the matter was really none of his business. The quarrel had been of several months' standing. Brother So-and-so had first refused to speak to Sister Such-and-such. Then things got so bad that he wouldn't even go to a meeting at which she might be in attendance. At this point, Mother appealed to Papa.

"He likes you, and you should be able to make him see his duty as a Christian," Mother said.

Papa made the attempt. Tactfully, he broached the subject. "After all, Brother So-and-so, you'll have to get along with her in heaven, someday."

Brother So-and-so grunted. "I'm not quite sure she's going to *be* there," he said.

The summer before Susie was to return to the States, a letter arrived from Gordon. "They want me to teach in Soochow for a couple of years. I won't need to spend time in the language school. . . ." You could see he was jubilant over the chance to return to China.

But Papa was anything but jubilant. He paced up and down the small enclosed porch of the Ki Kung Shan home. In the valley below, a river of mist floated gently by. "Somebody's been putting pressure on him. Do they think, just because he's a missionary's son, he should automatically become a missionary himself? That business of not going to the language school is poppycock! He never learned to read or write Chinese!"

"Let's not jump to conclusions," Mother said. "It could be a mature decision. He's twenty years old and has his degree from Wake Forest."

"What of his violin? And his art? You know how his teachers have been encouraging him. And he's been thinking of little else than finding a way to further his education. *This* is the time for his *training!*"

Mother believed Gordon's return might have been intended by the Lord as *part* of his training. "Well, there's nothing we can do about it now. In a few weeks he'll arrive in Shanghai."

And, in their welcome to the returning son, there was no hint of criticism. It seemed wonderful to have him home, to listen to his violin, to watch him daubing his palette, and to parry his teasing again.

On that side of the Pacific, we failed to see how the mounting pressure in America to "make the world safe for democracy" had spilled over from the completed war effort into the cause of missions, carrying with it much of the same enthusiasm and zeal. A seventy-five-million-dollar campaign among Southern Baptists was being whipped up to a surging movement not to be taken lightly. After all, who could be against missions in general? The force of public opinion was being channeled directly into the "right" direction. Here and there voices were raised in warning: *the ends sought could not be gained by the streamlined methods used so successfully in the making of automobiles*, they protested. But opinions that appear reactionary never make much headway against the current of a popular cause.

Back in the Gospel Mission days, Papa's position had been called "reactionary." "Landmarkism" was the label most often used for that particular kind of conservative viewpoint. It was a label that Papa found particularly odious. He resented any artificial classification of human beings and their opinions. Unlike medicines, people (whether saints or sinners) invariably harbored unknown ingredients and were never *all* good or *all* bad.

His way of coping with these divergencies after his return to the Southern Baptist fold was to emphasize the things which he had in common with the denomination. But here again, the whole emphasis of the denomination, hopefully seeking a new and better world (an emphasis with which he'd been in full accord in spite of Mother's position) seemed due for an overhaul. And he did want an end of conflict, even of that war of the spirit which had been so much a part of his younger days.

The Kingdom of Heaven looked a long way off. What, indeed, was the future of Christianity? He knew that, as in any war, unprepared recruits are a major problem, so an influx of immature workers would but multiply the problems on the field. But how else convert the world in a generation? Or in a million years? Even if all of Dixie were to move in on China, what could that mean among the ever-multiplying hordes of four hundred million people? Could any hope for a Christian world be based on the sheer force of numbers? If not, on what could it be based?

Mother didn't exactly say, "I told you so." She was probably learning that disillusionment is a normal process and can't be hurried. She shared in the dismay that swept the missionary community at the publication of a book by a group of laymen in America at about that time. Entitled *Rethinking Missions*, it was an effort to come to grips with the problem realistically. But neither diagnoses nor suggested remedies seemed to fit the illnesses besetting the organizations in question.

"That's what comes of thinking you can deal with the matter in terms of groups. In matters spiritual, you must deal with men individually; you know that," she said to Papa.

Papa agreed. In fact, he made it clear that such had been his position all along. You couldn't trip Papa in the matter of adding fractions without bringing them to a common denominator. The only difficulty lay in deciding just what *was* the common denominator. Not ecumenicity; you couldn't substitute union for unity. Not race; that had been discarded years ago. Not denomination; there was too much diversity, even there.

Papa, Mother, Gordon, and the other missionaries, at prayer meetings or picnic tables, wherever they gathered, discussed the matter endlessly. Again the ability to laugh at oneself came to the rescue. Someone conceived the idea of a skit to celebrate both Dominion and Independence days. This was in deference to all Americans, whether Canadian or Yankee. After a day of games and races and some fireworks at dusk, the whole community gathered to see the skit lampooning the laymen's commission that had produced *Rethinking Missions.*

Even the newcomers such as Gordon roared in laughter. Onstage a group of roving reporters raced about, getting the maximum of material to take home for public consumption with the minimum of exposure to the discomforts of the Chinese hinterland. Hop, skip, and jump, the fact-finders made the whole itinerary in a matter of days, and so qualified as experts.

"Would you believe it?" one exhausted fellow said to another as they flopped amid mountains of baggage on what was supposed to be the home-going steamer at Shanghai. "Would you believe it, those dumb missionaries in Hankow let the Chinese ask for the singing of "Jesus Loves Me" three times over in one service! What kind of worship is *that,* will you tell me?"

A letter written that same summer by Gordon to Aunt Ethel reveals much about his own reappraisal of life on the mission field, though scarcely from an objective point of view.

Dear Aunt Ethel,

Just six months ago today, I said "Good-bye" to you all in Wilmington. In some ways it seems like a very long time. . . . I didn't get back here, to the home in Chengchow, until the China New Year holidays. . . . It has taken me several days to get used to seeing Papa without a moustache; but other than that, my parents seem just the same and dear as always.

I am surprised to be able to see them in a strangely new light, however. Unlike the mantelpieces and stairs which seem to have shrunk in size, they seem to have increased in inward stature, perhaps because of my own maturing. They work so hard. Twice every day, Papa preached in his tent, last week, to two or three hundred people. There are always great throngs of people during the China New Year season. Other times he takes the city, street by street where there is a shop or place of business (such as a donkey-pulled mill for grinding wheat), and begins to visit with the proprietor. Since he doesn't interrupt their business they seem pleased at his interest. Over here, you can't expect the people to come to the places of worship until they have accepted Christianity. Mother goes every afternoon with her Bible woman to visit the women in their homes. I am amazed that they show so little discouragement. The task before them is so great that many missionaries give up, or get lazy. . . .

I have told Mother about Denise. She seems to think the engagement may not stand the test of time. China *is* a long way from you folks in North Carolina. And I did not think when I left that I'd be coming back any time soon. My plans now, however, are to return to the States for theological training in 1922, and to come back as a missionary sent by the Board, eventually. I believe Denise will be in full accord. I think she would like to see the work I'm doing with the boys in Soochow. I have an orchestra (of sorts) and am training the boys in track. You may remember how I used to go in for that at Wake Forest, feeling the need to overcome the physical weakness I had as a boy. Oh, there's a need for everything you have learned over here, believe me.

Celia has written us all about her wedding plans and your part in them. Since Soochow is only about fifty miles from Shanghai, I will be going to see her when they arrive as groom and bride, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon K. Middleton. And you will soon be seeing Susie. I hope she will get over her homesickness without too much trouble. . . .

We remember you every day in our family prayers. I can never forget the many kindnesses you and Uncle Add showed me every summer when we visited with you. Yours will always be to me my "other home." . . . Tell Ralph not to work too hard at that shipyard! . . .

Much love always,
GORDON

On the mountain that year we weren't the only ones taking a frank look at things we'd formerly taken for granted. Hints about this or that missionary excited our curiosity and made Gordon override Mother's reluctance to dwell upon the eccentricities of her fellows. To be sure, the little community had its anomalies, but probably no more than any other. There was the M.D. who'd allowed his wife to die in childbirth rather than admit his ineptness and call on another doctor for help. There was the lady who, in the isolation of the field, had succumbed to homosexuality. Another brother had probably shown paranoiac tendencies long before crossing the ocean; coming to the Orient could hardly have been expected to correct his deep-seated emotional vagaries. Once the little community had been thrown into a tizzy by a wandering Russian sailor who was subject to fits of some kind. Even when tied to an iron bed, he could whip himself over, bed and all. But between spells he was like anybody's son that just needed a bit of mothering.

Each summer there was a featured speaker with an emphasis that appealed to the committee in charge of religious services. Denominational differences seemed to matter very little. This particular summer there was a visit from Miss Monson. She was a friend of Mother's who'd had the singular experience of being the lone white woman on a pirate ship for twenty-three days.

We filed into the little chapel and took our seats. Green and purple sunshine from the window played over our heads. Outside, the cicadas filled the air with their monotonous rhythms, rising shrilly and dying down as if for some unseen choir director. The little Norwegian woman faced her dowdily arrayed, hopelessly dedicated audience and told her story:

> I was on my way from Tientsin to Hwang Hsien to visit Miss Lide's station. All afternoon I heard the words, "Go and buy some apples." I couldn't understand it. The boat trip takes only a few hours, and I didn't need apples. When the thought occurred to me that someone else might need them, I obeyed the voice.
>
> I think if I'd been in Honan I'd have recognized the robbers who were among the passengers when we set sail. But who would have thought of pirates in a great port like Tientsin? Just before daylight, however, when shots rang out over the ship, I knew what we were in for; and I was reminded of Isaiah 41:10.

Here, there was the rustling of many pages being turned to follow her quotation.

> *Fear not,* Marie, *for I am with thee,* Marie. *Be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee,* Marie, *yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*

Not even later could we explain it. It was as if we'd been taken by that same right hand and led to be eyewitnesses of the event. She was so motherly, and her Norwegian accent so pronounced.

The passengers were all ordered to the decks. I heard one say, "Lock the foreigner's door." But when they tried to lock it, the key broke, and they couldn't lock me in.

Later I noticed two of those cruel-looking men standing outside my door. I have never seen more vile-looking men than those. One pushed the other into my cabin and shut the door. But he couldn't lock it. There was that man in the little cabin, and I felt the devil himself was there. His face and neck and hands were covered with hideous sores, open sores. He sat on my suitcase almost breathing in my face.

I started the conversation. "Is your mother living?"

"Yes," he said.

"How old is she?"

He told me.

"Well," I said, "she's about my age."

I asked him about his father and the rest of the family, and we had a good long talk together. I asked him to open the door, and he did. We must have talked for over an hour. When he went out he had tears in his eyes.

Another of the robbers came in and told me to hide my watch. Later he came back. "I want you to give me your watch as a present," he said.

"No," I replied, "I have never given such presents to people I don't know."

"Don't you understand? If you give that to me, I'll be your friend."

"Thank you, but I don't want that kind of friend."

"Don't you understand?" he said, exasperated. "If I'm your friend, I'll ask the others to protect you."

"Well," I replied, "I don't need such protection. I have better protection. The Living God up there has promised to protect me."

He jumped to his feet and pointed his pistol at me. "I'll shoot you, then."

"No," I said, "you can't shoot me whenever you wish. My God says, 'No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.' You must have special permission from God to shoot me."

He raised his pistol and pointed it at me. But his hands were shaking. Finally he slammed out of the room. Nearly every day of the twenty-three that we were on the boat I heard that man quoting that verse. It just stuck.

The first man returned to the cabin. He said, "Let me see your watch."

"All right," I said. "If you want to see it, here it is."

"I'll give you twenty dollars for it."

"No," I said. "I wouldn't sell it even if you offered me many times that amount. Your money isn't clean money and I have never used anything but clean money all my life."

He knew what I meant. He knew that I had seen them robbing the junks of grain, leaving the farmers destitute of their yearly produce.

"Well," he said finally, "there's no help for it," and off he went with my watch. At the door he turned and said, "You are giving me this watch as a present, aren't you?"

"No," I replied, wanting the issue to be quite clear. "No, you are robbing me of it." So he went off. Later the chief brought it back to me.

For five days they looted every junk they came across. They brought me food, but I felt it would choke me.

"If you don't eat, you'll die," they said.

"Well, I can die, but I can't eat that stolen food." I seemed to see the faces of the victims looking up to the big boat in blank dismay.

I had four boxes of chocolates and a few cookies and those apples. For nine days I ate apples, chocolates, and cookies. After nine days I had nothing, but I didn't believe the Lord had forgotten me. On the morning of the tenth day, one of the crew scratched on the door of my cabin.

"Have you anything to eat?"

"No," I said.

"Well, I have eggs that I bought in Tientsin with my own money—clean money," he assured me. "I'm going to bring you some each morning." And he did. Every morning I had a hard-boiled egg and one at night. When I asked my blessing, I just asked God to make it supply all the needs of my body. And He did.

The pirates came daily. "What do you want?" they asked. "Let us bring you food, or you'll die."

Once the leader stood at the door with tears in his eyes. "Pastor—" he said. For twenty-three days, I have been pastor . . . .

The congregation rustled in gentle laughter. Outside, the cicadas clamored in the brilliant sunlight, but inside there was no stridency.

"Pastor," said the leader, "I can hardly eat my own food for thinking of you without any."

After about a week, the condition of the ship had grown deplorable. I prayed about it and came to the conclusion that the Lord who makes the winds His servants would make the robbers mine. I asked the leader to see that the deck was scrubbed and awnings brought out to shield the passengers. He did what I asked.

Often we talked together. I told him of our God's plan of grace in offering life to all who would receive Him. I told him, too, of the Lord's promise to come again, and that the nations were facing terrible turmoil, out of which only God could deliver them. I stressed the fact that God could and did deliver those who trusted in Him.

Their main concern, however, was how to get ransom from my friends. I could hear them discussing the problem in the cabin next to mine. One day the leader said to me, "Don't you know that you are worth much money?"

"Indeed, I do," I replied. "You may have met foreigners who are worth less than I, because I belong to the King of Kings."

"Yes," he said. "We want much for you, too."

"I'm sorry you do," I said, "for you won't get a dollar for me. My God is able to deliver me, but He won't give you money; you'll see."

On the nineteenth day two strangers boarded the ship, and the pirates dickered with them about a ransom. Probably they had been sent by the ship's company. I could hear every word they said. The robbers demanded $200,000.00 for the ship, and the two men asked, "Can't the foreigner pay half of it?"

The chief answered, "Well, you have to be quick, for I'll tell you the truth about the foreigner. She hasn't been eating all this time, and she is on her dying bed."

Thinking the men should not be allowed to report things so, I just stepped outside my cabin door and walked up and down the deck. The chief was sitting with his back to me, but those men saw me and nodded and smiled.

From then on we knew that gunboats were in close pursuit, and we saw the terrible fear that gripped the pirates. Three different times they planned to carry me off in one of the stolen junks. They pointed out the junk to which I'd been assigned, in which bedding and food had already been stored. Then, just as they were on the point of leaving, a sudden storm arose. The next night the excitement mounted again, but a messenger arrived, and they decided to smoke opium together. The third time, they sent a man to my door. He stood facing me, and I him. We must have stared at each other for five minutes. Finally he shut the door with a bang, and I heard him say, "I just can't do it, I tell you."

It was Sunday, the twenty-third day, at three o'clock, that we heard the shot of cannon. Some of the robbers left the ship immediately. Ten were left behind. What a race we had, then! But we were delivered. Of course we were delivered. "Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible be delivered."

When the pirates were captured and the passengers released, they swarmed about me, clamoring for the tracts I had. "We have seen that your God is God," they said, "and we want to know Him, too."

Papa thought Miss Monson's story was terrific. He shook her hand warmly after the service. "Thank you for helping me to see things," he said.

"See what?" she asked.

"Something I've been looking for half my life," he replied, enigmatically.

Afterwards, as we climbed the graveled walk to our home, Papa's cane seemed to move in a sprightlier arch than usual. Mr. Braun's home was just above ours, so he and Papa always shared impressions about speakers on the way home after services. Mr. Braun was one of the newer recruits to the mission.

"Wasn't that the darndest thing?" Mr. Braun said.

Papa would scarcely have described it so, but you could see he agreed. "I guess the important thing is not so much the direction the old world seems to be taking at the moment," Papa said musingly, "as it is one's own inner equipment, eh?"

Gordon laughed. "Do you mean she's made a premillennialist out of you? That's what you've been trying to do for some time, isn't it, Mother?"

"Don't try to pin any kind of tag on me," Papa said. "I've had enough tags. Just mark it down that I'm relinquishing a pipe dream that never really served me too well in the first place. The important thing is that any new world has to be of the Lord's making, and to that I say, 'Even so, come quickly, Lord!'" He laughed. "Funny thing, it's a great relief to turn it over to Him, after all!"

"So what is your common denominator, Papa?" Susie liked her metaphors neatly wrapped.

"Didn't you see it? Her talking, unafraid, to that man on that suitcase? One human to another! That's the only common denominator under heaven, isn't it?"

Mother nodded, her eyes very bright. "And you get that kind of insight only at Calvary, don't you?" she said softly.

At the open-air services held each Sunday evening in the courtyard of the China Inland Mission home, our elders gathered with no discernible motive other than just to enjoy their religion. Chinese lanterns flickered above us. There was never a set program. We just sang, song after song, with now and then a short prayer and a concluding psalm. We got the feeling of being in on the beginnings of things. When we sang, "Day Is Dying in the West," day was doing just that. The choice of "Eternal Father, Strong to Save" meant that someone we knew was probably in real peril on the sea. And if a parent asked for "Peace, Perfect Peace," no one needed to underline the part about *loved ones far away*. On the occasions when death had visited the hill, there was a poignant significance in the melody of "A Day's March Nearer Home" floating out on the evening mists. Sometimes there were solos, or duets.

The harsh Honan atmosphere had taken its toll of Mother's singing voice, but Gordon's clear tenor was much in demand at these evening services.

The walk home in the gentle darkness found us enjoying our uncomplicated way of life. Brother Braun stepped jauntily along the path just ahead of us. "Aren't you getting excited over the impending visit of the Bishop of all Honan, *Doctor* Herring?" Mr. Braun was one of the few who could meet Papa's teasing and give it back with good measure.

"Don't you *Doctor* me, you rascal!"

"Oh, it's just a matter of time. When you come back from your next furlough you'll be sporting an honorary degree like the rest of them, and blessed if I don't think it'll be downright becoming!"

But Papa had other ideas. "I tell you honestly, Braun, the only reason I'd want those fellows to offer me a D.D. is so I could throw it right back in their faces! It'd be different if it was earned," he insisted. He swung his cane through the overhanging bamboo, spraying us with dew. "When did Baptists grow so important that it wasn't enough to be called 'Brother'?"

Mr. Braun laughed in the languid teasing way we loved. "Oh-oh, Dr. Herring, never let the Bishop of all Honan hear such talk!"

"Well, here's one part of Honan he's not bishop of," Papa retorted. "And besides, if you insist on calling me 'Doctor,' you know what degree I'm going to confer on you?"

"Not the third degree! Oh, please, Dr. Herring!"

"From now on, sir, it's not Brother Braun, but *Bishop* Braun, with all the rights and privileges appertaining thereunto." Papa strode along, satisfied that he'd executed a proper squelch.

Braun, however, was hard to repress. Wherever a group gathered at picnics or around the tennis courts, he'd take a stand close to Papa and say something to "Doctor" Herring in a clear, carrying voice.

And in turn, Papa would address his favorite bishop.

"I didn't know you Baptists had bishops," remarked a Methodist lady once.

"Sometimes, the fact is you can't always tell what Baptists are going to break out with next," Papa said, and he and Mr. Braun grinned broadly.

CHAPTER 26

Not Without Honor

When the time came for Susie to leave for college in 1920, China was undergoing political upheavals again. One war lord had pre-empted the railroads north of Sien Tien, and no one knew when the other war lord would "liberate" them. There was nothing to do but camp at the railroad station at the foot of the mountain and wait for something to come along. After a matter of thirty-six hours a combination freight and passenger train hove into view.

The locomotive was blue instead of the usual black: all over the cowcatcher, the footwalk, and on every tenable ledge, sat blue-clad Chinese, clinging desperately to their chance of escape. Papa tried to push the trunk aboard a jam-packed freight car, preliminary to gaining a foothold, but it was of no use. He and Susie could perhaps find standing room, but no more. And it was inconceivable that Susie should leave behind the clothes that Mother had so laboriously made for her debut into Western society.

"There'll be another train along," the station manager said. Papa, whether he wanted to or not, had to take the fellow's word for it. The train that came along, an hour later, wasn't nearly so crowded, but it was hot and dusty.

In contrast, the trip from Hankow to Shanghai by boat was delightful. At the invitation of the captain, Susie explored the ship from bridge to engine room. But time was short, and she and Papa had much to talk about. They stood by the rail, facing the wind together. What had been his thoughts as he'd traveled in earlier years past these very shores? These were things she knew would never find their way into letters.

"There's where the dragon was caught," Papa said, pointing to the reef of the Little Orphan. He turned to a man standing beside him, noting that he wore a wrist watch, and bowed. *"Chi tien tsung?* (What time is it?)," he asked.

"The time, suh?" The Chinese echoed with an unmistakably Southern drawl and gave the hour, smiling broadly.

"You've been to the States?" Papa asked, surprised.

The Chinese nodded. It turned out that he had run a laundry in Sumter, South Carolina, for fourteen years and knew Papa's uncle David Alderman very well. Both men were amazed at the coincidence. "American people say all the time, 'small world,' but I think they don't know what makes it small until they travel, no?"

Papa nodded.

A complete circling of the globe hadn't convinced Susie of its smallness, however. While the idea of going to America was terribly exciting, she must remember all this. China had a warmth of color—an earthy quality that she would miss dreadfully. She might never get back again, and even if she did, things would be different. They would shrink in her absence, like the mantels at home.

The heat of Shanghai was oppressive after Ki Kung's misty coolness.

"Don't you want to buy a hat at Whiteaway Laidlaw's?" Papa said. "Come on, you'll need a pretty hat!"

Susie shook her head. How could she explain to him the need to learn what American girls were wearing before spending money on clothes? Mother's efforts had been so well-meaning, but even she . . . .

"I know. You're still disappointed over missing Celia's wedding." They'd found seats in a soda shop. Papa ordered lemonades.

Susie stirred the ice with her straw. Originally her passage had been booked on the *Empress of Japan* for a June sailing, which would have enabled her to reach North Carolina in time to be Celia's maid of honor. But something had happened to the boat, and her departure had been postponed. She swallowed her cool drink lingeringly. "I guess so," she said finally.

"Anyway, it'll be nice having Celia and her new husband, and George, too, meet you in Vancouver, won't it?"

Susie smiled. She couldn't quite trust her voice for some reason.

Papa stood up briskly. "I know. You can help me pick out a watch for Ralph. He'll be graduating in the spring, and it'll be better for you to take it to him than to trust the mails." He shepherded her through the crowds to the jewelry counter at Whiteaway Laidlaw's. Bright electric lights glinted on the splendor of gold chains and hunting cases. They took a long time selecting just the right one. "Sure that's the one you like best?" Papa asked.

"If he doesn't like that, he's crazy," Susie said.

"Don't you want something for yourself? A little sailor hat or something?" Papa urged.

"Would it be all right if we got another soda?"

Papa blinked. Anything Susie wanted!

They must have had a dozen sodas. They'd walk around the block and come back to the same table and smile brightly up at the same waitress. Her smile became pleasantly familiar.

The boat was to sail at midnight. On the tender, Susie met Miss Olive Bagby, who was to chaperon her across an ocean and a continent.

"But you don't look a bit like your brother Gordon!" Miss Bagby said, not bothering to conceal her disappointment. Miss Bagby was a teacher in Soochow, too.

Papa was still in charge of the situation, however. "I'll go up to see your cabin, but I've got to hurry back. The tender is due to wait only a half-hour. You look around for some nice girl your own age. You're going to enjoy this, I'm sure."

At the railing, Susie's careful posture of maturity crumpled. She clung to Papa. "I don't believe I want a-a college education a-after all."

"Nonsense," Papa said and his voice was gruff. "Want me to blow your nose again?"

Susie emitted something between a sob and a giggle.

Papa tilted her chin up and kissed her, drew out his handkerchief and blew his own nose briskly, then began the descent on the ladder. She watched until he disappeared below decks on the rocking tender.

Two hours later someone called Susie to the shoreward rail. There, below, stood Papa, his face a blur, but an arm clearly discernible over the black heads around him, waving a hearty *bon voyage*. He'd been there all the time.

In Vancouver, Susie faced another emotional hurdle. It would be wonderful to see the grown-up members of her family, but the thought of their returning without her to the land of her roots made her unbearably homesick. The bride and groom, and George—recently mustered out of the Navy, where he'd been a surgeon during World War I—were now on their way as missionaries to China. They were in a party of seventy recruits. Southern Baptists were doing their part toward evangelizing the world in a generation. Twenty-four hours after the ship was to dock, these men and women would be steaming away on it, headed for the Orient like the mighty army they were always singing about. Susie was all in favor of the mighty army, but why did *her* family have to leave, just as she was coming to America? The whole idea had much of the bleakness that she remembered from her former visit to the States.

She stood against the retaining rope that was supposed to hold back the horde of debarking passengers until the purser had given a signal. Attending to the matters of visas and baggage seemed infinitely less important to her than catching the first glimpse of Celia. Suddenly she saw them: George, Celia, and—yes, it must be Gordon

Middleton, on Celia's right—all waving frantically to catch her attention. O-oh! Wasn't Celia pretty? A pox on regulations! Susie darted under the rope and flung herself into Celia's arms. Neither of them noticed the wave of laughter that rippled through the crowd.

"Oh, Susie! Susie! Susie!" Celia said, pushing her out to arm's length. "I can't believe it! You've grown up!"

"Better than down," George said.

"I'm Gordon," the new member of the family said.

"Yes, I know," Susie said, laughing and crying at once. "I mean, that's who I thought . . . I'm so glad . . . ."

The timbers of the dock reeked of oil and tar. Porters bustled bags through the clusters of voyagers. A confusion of noise ricocheted from the black iron rafters overhead.

"Come on," George said, taking her arm. "We'll get you through customs; then we'll go have lunch. Hungry?"

"Oh, no—I mean yes! Yes. Food would be wonderful!"

George talked her through customs; Gordon handled the baggage, while Susie chattered at Celia. "They're all fine. Mary's as tall as I am, and Alec—you'll have to look up to him. Mother and Papa are the same, greyer, perhaps—but you'll see them, and oh, I want to go back with you. Take me with you!"

"What?" George broke in. "After all we've been through? What would customs think? Come on, let's eat."

"Can I have cornflakes? That's what I remember most: food that doesn't have to be cooked!"

"Sure, you can have a whole box."

They pushed through the crowded streets into a restaurant and found a booth. "Whew!" George said. "Are you girls as glad as I am just to *sit?*"

When the waitress brought the orders, the boys attacked their food with gusto. "What time is it?" Susie asked anxiously. She looked at Celia and blinked furiously. *Here we are, after five years, and it'll be five more before I see her again. If only we could have a month or even a week together—but twenty-four hours! Not time for anything.* This was part of what she'd been dreading. All about her was a strange urgency: *grow up, hurry, there's no time to lose. Everybody else knows the answers.*

They were all three looking at her, smiling gently when she met their eyes. "I love you all!" she blurted and laid down her spoon. Food seemed suddenly unimportant.

Celia would have answered, but she couldn't get the words past the lump in her throat. George cleared his throat gently. "We love you, too," he said. He stood up. "Let's walk to the hotel."

The fresh air was just what they needed. The crowd had thinned. They strolled along, four abreast. George opened his penknife and set about cleaning his nails. A piece of toothpick moved unobtrusively in the corner of Gordon's mouth.

"Boys!" Celia scolded, and the tone of her voice was just like Mother's.

Solemnly George produced a second knife, proffered it to Gordon, dug into his pocket again, and found a toothpick for himself. Grinning, but without a word, they resumed the business at hand.

Susie giggled. *How like Papa George was!*

At the Hotel Vancouver, Gordon said he'd move in with George and let Susie have his place with Celia. Gordon was a gentle soul. Susie liked her new brother-in-law. "But don't you think we should register her?" he said.

Susie didn't think her presence was *that* important.

That night, Celia briefed Susie on what to expect at college. "You'll be wanting to turn up your hair," she said. "But don't go ratting it into cootie garages!"

"Cootie garages?" Susie wore her brown hair in a heavy braid to her waist. She knew what cooties were, and garages, but . . . .

"Yes," Celia said. "The girls rat their hair into big bunches over the ears. It spoils the gloss. You'd lose all those gold lights."

Susie sat before the mirror, divided her hair into two coils, crossed them in the back, looped them around her head, and fastened the ends at her neck with one of Celia's pins. The hair around her face managed itself pretty well with the merest hint of waves. "How does that look?"

Celia, head slanted, appraised her thoughtfully. "That might do. You'll know. Enough like the others, so you're not conspicuous; and enough like yourself, so you're you. Just remember to keep your eyes open."

The next day all was confusion again—the familiar confusion of travel to far-off places. The fact that her family was heading *west* to go to the East, and she heading *east* to go to the West, was in accord with the general feeling of bewilderment.

"I still think we should have registered Susie," Gordon said, depositing baggage on the dock. "Missionaries should at least be honest!"

"Shucks!" Susie said. "We're just saving the Board money. Why should the hotel care if we double up, anyway?" Chinese innkeepers had no such scruples. She dug into her purse and produced her ticket, fully two yards long. "Look what the Board bought me. Takes me all the way to Wilmington."

The others laughed. The point wasn't worth belaboring.

The wharf became a sort of Baptist convention ground, with Southern accents all over the place.

"So that's the girl who broke the barriers?" a friend of Gordon's said, halting momentarily alongside.

Celia laughed. "That's the girl!"

The last flurry of leave-taking, hugs, and admonishings left Susie breathless. Miss Bagby joined her just as the gangplank was raised. They taxied to the station.

Not until Susie was seated on the train that evening, her chaperon trying to divert her attention to the British Columbian landscape racing past the car windows, was she able to assess the excitement within her. Getting an education in America might be fun! As Papa said, acclimating yourself was the important thing, whether mentally to a state of flux or, more particularly, to (Heaven's blessings attend her!) the good Old North State of Papa's origins. This time, Susie thought to herself, she might *enjoy* America.

During the years that followed, family news slowed down to the pace of letters crossing the Pacific. Papa noted jubilantly the occasional receipt of a letter in as little as four weeks' time, and he always inquired as to how fast his had traveled. George and the Middletons went to the Peking Language School; Gordon resumed his teaching in Soochow; Alec and Mary stayed on Ki Kung Shan at boarding school; Ralph was finishing at Wake Forest; and Susie entered as a freshman at Meredith. How Papa managed to keep two and sometimes three children in college at a time is still something of a mystery, except that life in China can be lived very, very frugally, as we well knew. And he and Mother were used to privations—which were never mentioned, however. The women of the denomination had what they called a "Margaret Fund" that gave us a hundred dollars a semester. And we were usually given tutoring jobs to help out in the matter of tuition.

Mother's letters invariably included her brand of sermonizing. She told also about the new church Papa was building outside the city wall, what Chen Tze-fu was cooking for dinner, and the latest vital statistics on the kine. We read about Papa's two namesakes and the cute things they said.

We remembered Papa's namesakes very well—not just one, but two round-faced cherubs born to Chen Tze-fu and his girl-wife, Pomegranate. One summer, on returning from the mountains, Mary and Susie were delighted to find a new baby in the servants' quarters. They decided he needed a bath, even though his mother was sure they'd kill him introducing him to water before he was a year old!

"What's his name?" they asked, anointing the scalp with Vaseline as Mother suggested and ignoring Pomegranate's fears about water.

"No name. Devils get baby when given name too soon!"

"Shucks! We'll name him for Papa. That'll take care of things!"

Da-wei grew, and the family prospered with no untoward events.

Papa's name (and King David's), in its Chinese phonetic approximation, meant "Great Protector," although the meaning of the Chinese characters probably had no more significance to the translators of the Bible than it had to us. Not so to Pomegranate. When the day came that a second son was born, without hesitation she named him Siao-wei—"Little Protector." After all, could anything be more logical? Small follows great. Oldest son, Great Protector; younger son, Small Protector. So-not-so?

Susie hadn't finished her freshman year of work when news came that Gordon's visit had been interrupted by the flu and that Mother was taking him to Peking to see him through a possible operation for mastoiditis. Rockefeller's gift to China in the form of the Peking Union Medical College had never seemed more wonderful. There, would be available to Gordon all that medical science had to offer anywhere in the world. How good it was that Western civilization had reached so far into the world's hinterland! But there were some things no civilization could perform. There were times in the days that followed when, as Papa put it, everything depended on one's inner equipment.

Mother rode back and forth by rickshaw from the Language School, where George and his bride and the

Middletons were staying, to the medical center where Gordon was operated on. And the kinship of suffering brought out the friendly kindness of interns and nurses alike without regard to race or creed. Mother's letters were full of gratitude. Then, when Gordon seemed well out of danger, she took the train to Chengchow again.

Two days later came a telegram with the one word, *come.*

Mother and Papa arrived in time to see Gordon die agonizingly of spinal meningitis. And to North Carolina went a cable with the simple message: "Gordon, heavenly choir." Nobody had to tell Ralph and Susie what it meant.

Celia's letter filled in some of the details that would otherwise have been lost.

Dear Ralph and Susie,

You will be wanting to hear details about dear Gordon after getting the cable. I know it was a shock to you as it was to us. Gordon and I were always very close, as you know, keeping in the same grades all through college, sharing our algebra problems, etc. My roommates at Meredith used to think he was so romantic! When he'd look at a girl, thinking merely that here was something pretty, she'd react out of all proportion. He always made a hit on the glee-club trips. . . . As you know, he took violin from Miss Ruegger at Meredith, and she was very enthusiastic about his promise in that direction.

But all of that was not to be.

Mother is taking it so hard—that is, she's unable to cry or give way to her emotions as Papa can. I think she has known too much discipline in her life. It's the sort of thing you don't realize as you're growing up, but I can see it now. But Papa's gentleness is bound to get through to her eventually.

One reason it was so hard on them is that Gordon seemed to be well on the way toward recovery when Mother left him in March. He still had bandages about his head, but his color was good, and he was beginning to have a little appetite. I took him some baked custard and he seemed to appreciate it so much. I also took him a letter from Denise. She hadn't been writing too often, and he looked happy to see that. Only later, how I wished I'd not taken it to him at all! Really I didn't get to see Gordon again, for the doctor put me to bed because I was threatened with a miscarriage. Then, there was the sudden turn for the worse, and they sent the telegram to Papa. . . .

Mother tried so hard to ease the pain for Gordon, but there was nothing anyone could do. I imagine in her letters she just reports the stark details without mention of her own suffering. That would be like her. In some respects this is a very bleak and comfortless country, and wounds like that are hard to heal in any land. . . .

It wasn't until their return to Chengchow that Mother went through his things and found the letter from Denise, saying she wanted to end their engagement. . . .

Be sure to write home regularly.

Love,
Celia

Not until six months later was Mother able to weep, and then (quite naturally, as it seemed to us) the release came in the healing atmosphere of Ki Kung Shan.

"Where is that lovely son of yours, the one with the beautiful tenor voice?" a lady asked, unaware of what had happened to Gordon. And Mother covered her face and they sobbed together.

The next furlough period found our parents leaving their two youngest, Alec and Mary, and facing a return to China as senior missionaries and alone again. We stood on the platform at the Wilmington station and watched them wave good-bye, knowing well the frustrations and dangers to which they returned. But the concern writ large on Mother's face was for us. There were dangers on this side of the Pacific of which she was increasingly aware. Papa put his arm about her and blinked furiously. The bustle of mail trucks and late-arriving passengers was slowing down. The conductor slung the footstand on the platform and called, "'Bo-o-oard!"

Papa leaned out as the train lurched into motion. "Remember that photo. Get it taken today!"

It seemed like a poor time for a photo, but promises were promises. We went down to the leading photographer. But group photos weren't fashionable at the time, and he refused even to attempt the job. We went to another and another. By this time we were laughing shakily. The story was dismally the same. At the very end of the list, in a dingy upstairs studio, the photographer threw up dingier hands, deploring our low sense of values.

"A photograph of four people? That would be no photograph. That would be a map!"

"O.K." Ralph said. "So be it. Give us a map then, please."

But when our parents received it, they voiced no complaints.

In 1927, Mother began to show symptoms of returning sprue. Reluctantly, Papa saw that her health demanded a return to the States. China's turmoil had grown steadily worse. Sometimes, for months at a time, we'd heard little from our parents because of the disrupted mails. In 1926 there had been four distinct military revolts in Honan. One general is reported to have telegraphed another: "I've been ordered to attack you. Which side are you on?" The second generation missionaries, George and his little family and the Middletons, had returned to the States. They had children to consider.

And then the disaster in Nanking caught the attention of the world. The major warring factions, headed by Chang Tso-lin in the north and Chiang Kai-shek in the south, had been struggling for months to gain control of Nanking, China's ancient southern capital. Here had grown a strong center of education—a language school, universities, hospitals, for all of which missionaries would rather die than abandon to forces thought to be bolshevistic, in either case. Confusing the picture for Western news agencies was the anomalous nature of those forces. Labels refused to remain valid. Tensions built up unbearably. Fears for the safety of foreigners mounted, though none of them doubted the loyalty of their Chinese friends. Foreign troops moved in, just in case of trouble, and gunboats, British and American, anchored in the river.

On "Black Thursday," March 24, 1927, all hell broke loose. Dr. Williams—greatly beloved physician—was killed; men were bound and threatened; women stripped. Street after street was looted, and victims—hundreds of them—were left to die. Flames writhed over a city that had been peaceful for centuries. The smell of smoke drifted across to the gunboats, where sailors watched in frustration through field glasses. To stand and watch the carnage was to feel the guilt of the murderer. Finally someone gave the word to fire. Salvo after salvo boomed across the city, followed by a sudden silence—the silence of death and shock.

Even the world's great presses seemed stunned. A few voices were heard, like twitterings of birds after thunder. The twitterings mounted in a gradual crescendo to charge and countercharge. Who was right and who was wrong? Nobody seemed to know.

The missionaries closed their ears to the futile strife of words. They had a problem of their own. How had the Gospel of Peace awakened such greed and induced the terrible carnage? Missionaries had made their mistakes, but they had tried in the main to be kind. And now strident voices were being raised, objecting not only to Christianity but to kindness itself, as if every motive were suspect. The world would never outgrow its *need* of the Gospel, no matter how vigorously men opposed it! What would happen to Christianity in China if the missionaries had to leave? On both sides of the Pacific, experts considered the question.

Deep within Papa was the conviction that the seed he'd sown would bring forth fruit, regardless of his own movements. Seeds had been known to lodge within the crevices of rocks and force a living wedge upward toward the sun. So might God's word.

The night the Herrings were to leave Chengchow, Papa's Chinese friends gathered to do him honor. He was unaware of the undercurrent of excitement among them. He'd asked that no fuss be made at his leaving. But he'd asked the impossible. A great banner with hand-painted characters told the world of the high esteem in which he and Mother were held. Gathered from the country stations, from the stalls in the market place, from the street of the silk merchants, and from the *yamen* (police courts) were those who had learned to love him. They stood on the platform and sang and bowed and clapped.

Papa was completely overcome. *"Buh gan dong!"* he insisted. "Not worthy, not worthy!" All the way to Kaifeng, he stared out at the changing, moonlit landscape. *"Bu gan dong!"*

Just in time for Mary's graduation, they arrived in Raleigh. The corridors of the bold new buildings at Meredith College were full of smartly-dressed parents, all in a hurry to go somewhere and do something of importance. We found ourselves shepherding our parents as if they were children in an alien environment. Papa's promise of becoming a heavy-set old man had vanished. There was a fragile look about them both. But Mother's dark eyes glowed with the same bright interest as always.

"Look out!" she'd gasp as we stopped at corners for traffic. "Here comes a car that's baring its teeth!"

"But it'll stop at the traffic light, Mother."

How should we help our parents to adjust? In this hemisphere, youth was in the saddle. The Roaring Twenties had not yet been eclipsed by the depression that brought in the Wailing Thirties. Everywhere, youthfulness and sophistication were in demand. A tall youngster had just flown across the Atlantic. Another had swum the English channel. And the magic phrase was, "Every day in every way, I'm getting better and better."

"The churches don't want old men over forty nowadays," one of Papa's college mates told him. "They say we can't hold the young people. Unless you dye your hair and find some elixir of youth, you can't get a pulpit."

But Papa rejected the thought of retiring. For all his seventy years, he wasn't built for it, nor educated to it by life in the Orient. In China, the span of a man's years was something to cherish. There, Papa's grey hair and fragile look had earned for him increasing respect, not scorn.

"Thing that gets me," Papa mused aloud, "is this business of quitting when the work's not done. I figure the Lord called me to preach, and I haven't heard Him revoke the call." And, in our bright sophistication, we failed to bridge the gap between generations.

Through the years since his father's death, Papa had made payments on a small home in Asheville in which he'd invested his share of the patrimony. There, he and Mother planned to live when they retired—sometime in the far-off future, of course. Lately, the house hadn't been rented, and the mortgage seemed to be growing, rather than dwindling. Mother was indignant.

"Your father's just too trusting," she said. "I felt all along that something was rotten in Denmark."

Susie felt it might be somewhere even closer than that. She drove Papa to Asheville to see what could be done with the mess.

"Who's your real estate agent?" his friends in Asheville asked him. He told them.

"He may be a big shot in some circles, but he's been ousted from the Masonic Lodge for cheating widows out of their savings!" Papa's friends were pessimistic. "Real estate has been in a terrible slump here, anyway."

Papa went over the papers carefully and decided the only thing to do was to turn the property back to the mortgage company and take the loss.

In the bright sunlight beside the car, the agent sweated profusely and mopped a florid brow. "You know we did the best we could, don't you, Brother Herring?" he wheezed.

"He's no brother of yours," Susie muttered to herself.

But Papa held out his hand. "I'm sure you did," he said. Susie looked at him incredulously. But it was plain he meant every word. He shook hands warmly. "God bless you," he said.

Susie's jaw dropped. What could you do about a man with a faith like that? Was there any point in worrying about his lack of sophistication? How would sophistication have helped, anyway?

But Papa didn't have to retire. Not then, at any rate. The Baptist church in a little community twenty miles south of Raleigh where he and Mother had spent the previous furlough called him to be its pastor. As excited as a boy over his first job, Papa wrote the Board to relieve them of responsibility for his salary. Nobody felt more keenly than Papa the weight of debt on the Mission Board, and this was his contribution.

We laughed tenderly at Papa's way of saying Fuquay Springs. Not as the natives said it, but as if it were Chinese: *foo* meaning "happy" and *kwei* meaning "country." But of course the pronunciation had significance only in the family. Once again, he and Mother were setting up housekeeping, with the added thrill of being able to make a home for the scattered family to return to.

And once again, a Carolina community received them into its affections. Every afternoon they drove to the tobacco farms to visit their parishioners. Every week they dropped in to see a little fellow who'd been so badly burned that the fact that he was alive at all was a constant source of wonder. They stood in late summer under weatherbeaten arbors to enjoy scuppernongs, and Papa always lifted his hat, afterwards, his thin voice giving thanks to God for "mercies not enjoyed everywhere on the globe."

But Papa's eyesight was failing. A cataract had almost blinded one eye. He let Mother read the paper to him, but there was no disguising the fact that he fumbled in the pulpit. And he'd never had practice in church ritual as observed in this country.

"But you'll just have to remember to take up the collection," Mr. Spence teased him. No one was more loyal than Mr. Spence, the church treasurer. "Even if money doesn't mean much to you, we can't run a church long without it."

Susie was getting married in November. This would be the first time he'd performed the ceremony for one of his own children. The parsonage was filled with contagious excitement. When the day came, everything moved off without a hitch. But when he came to the blank for the name of the groom, Clinton LeRoy Jefferies, Papa's mind went blank, too.

Sensing the trouble quickly, Susie supplied the words softly and no one behind her knew.

After the ceremony, the happy groom pressed a sizable bill into his new father-in-law's hand.

Papa looked at it in amazement. "But I'm not selling her," he said.

His closer friends would have let him down more tenderly than actually happened. The morning after his return from a trip to another state, Papa was greeted by the milkman.

"Well, I guess you heered the deacons met last night, Brother Herring," he said blithely. "They're gonna ask you to resign."

Papa's face, as he relayed the news to Mother, was bleak.

"Baptists should take a tip from the Methodists," Mother said sharply. "There should be some way less cruel than this!"

But Papa took the operation without anesthetic. Though it required more courage than some of his children would have had, he decided to live on in the community, and once again he felt no bitterness.

When Gordon Middleton wrote to the Annuity Board to ask that Papa be reinstated for pension, reminding them of the forty years he had already served, Papa allowed himself only one testy remark directed against no one in particular.

"So now I'm superannuated. Got too many years! Can't you see why I sometimes get homesick for China?"

Mother had grown weaker and weaker, and she and Papa had to give up the little cottage in Fuquay. They decided to live with Susie in the mountains of West Virginia. That year the depression moved into every household and became a guest at every table. Susie decided to meet its challenge by buying a cow. It would provide milk for the children and give Papa something to do. Again Papa felt needed. But when the winter snows came and he plodded, knee-deep, to the barn to care for the cow, Susie sat in the window and bit her tongue lest she betray her fears that he'd break a leg in the drifts.

Her concern about Mother was even more urgent. Once, while waiting in a doctor's office in Raleigh, Susie had seen an article on sprue. (The disease was practically unknown in this country.) She sat down and wrote the author, a Dr. Castle, of Boston. He answered kindly and immediately. "I'm delighted to be able to tell you that your mother need not die of sprue," he wrote. He suggested that we take her to Duke, where the doctors would be informed on the latest treatments. At their suggestion we gave Mother liver by mouth and liver by injection, and for a couple of years she actually gained weight. But gradually the beneficial effects wore off, and she began suffering pain through her whole digestive tract. We realized that she was slowly starving and urged her to go back to Duke.

"But I don't like being the prime exhibit of doctors, even those as kind as the ones at Duke," she protested. "The Lord has healed me before, and I know He can do it again!"

"If indeed He would!" Our faltering thought was unexpressed. Ralph and Celia drove up the three mountain ranges to Bluefield. They discussed the matter soberly with Susie and Papa. It seemed evident that the Lord had no intention of using direct means at present—not in this country where He'd granted so much discovery of scientific truth. The choice, however, was hers. Our pleas seemed like lack of faith. Papa's blue eyes were troubled. He'd always bolstered her faith. He couldn't doubt her now.

Her courage was really remarkable. She'd seen much of the evils of opium and its derivatives in China and would have none of it herself, even when the pain seemed unendurable. Actually, she was bedfast only two weeks.

In the home, Susie's children gave their grandmother intervals of distraction from the increasing weakness and pain. She especially loved little Ted, who bore her family name, Rea. Once Susie stopped in at the florist's with the intention of taking her a rose. Mother loved roses. But the odor of the shop was too funereal, and Susie fled, empty-handed. She was not yet ready to let Mother go.

Mostly we dreaded the effect of her going on Papa. Who would read to him? What would he ever do without the gentle force of her presence? Undoubtedly there are some things about dying at home, surrounded by children and grandchildren, that make it easier and, somehow, more natural than dying in a hospital. At least so it seemed for Mother. But for Papa? How would he sustain the loss? Even that, he would take in stride. What was it he had said about the Christian? Well-equipped? That was Papa.

Actually it was almost as if Mother chose the time of her departure. Alec had arrived from New Orleans on Saturday, Mary from South Carolina earlier in the week. Only George found it difficult to leave his practice in Indiana. He arrived, at last, shortly after noon, Sunday, and Mother smiled a welcome. He sat by her bed all afternoon, his fingers firm on her pulse. A vivid September sunset brightened all the rooms of the house.

"It's nearly time for Miss Miller," Susie said. "She can always make Mother more comfortable than we can, for some reason."

Ralph nodded. "It's the time for evening worship, too."

George leaned over Mother and applied the stethoscope. "She's gone," he said.

Mother and Papa had already decided where they'd be buried: in the shadow of the moss-hung trees of Wells's Chapel and in sight of the old homestead where Great-Grandfather Wells had lived long before the War Between the States. There, peace seemed to have taken root with the live oaks.

In the soft September sunlight, friends gathered from everywhere to fill the church and spill over into the yard. Olive Lawton came all the way from South Carolina. At the organ, the blind organist played while the congregation sang triumphantly, "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name," just as Mother would have had it. She'd come a long, long way from Australia, but somehow it didn't seem so far from heaven, after all.

CHAPTER 27

For Which The First Was Made

Shortly after Mother died, Mary decided to go to China as a missionary. Alec and his wife and baby had already gone. Could Papa stand to relinquish his youngest to the calling to which he'd given so many years of his own life? Didn't he need Mary as we had needed him, once?

The questions were academic. If Mary wanted to go to China, he would put nothing in her way. He had done his best to influence the characters of his children, but their careers? Never.

For Mary's farewell service in Ralph's big church in Winston-Salem, we gathered to hear both father and daughter. After a short talk by Mary, Papa was to be the featured speaker. Fifty years had passed since he'd been a young recruit, speaking a farewell to the same church with Maggie at his side.

Again we were enveloped in the familiar pattern of the Sunday morning worship service. Celia and Gordon were there from Raleigh with their five children. George lived too far away to come, but a number of friends from Mount Airy drove over to remind Papa of their continuing interest. Many of these were old-timers who could recall Maggie and the Gospel Mission days. We could see the pride Papa felt in Ralph, his preacher son, and in the church, so devoted.

We knew, of course, that we weren't exactly impartial observers, but if we could judge from their response, neither were those about us.

Standing behind the pulpit, Papa warmed to his audience. A successful operation on one eye had given him back a large measure of his sight, and with it, a renewed zest. "My! my!" he glowed. "Who couldn't preach to this audience?"

He was preaching from his favorite text. "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold. Them also I must bring." Mary's words, preceding his, had given him the cue. But there was much that Mary—or any other young person—couldn't know. Dedication to God had been the motivation of his life, as it was to be of hers, but the rewards the years had brought him far outweighed any sacrifices he might have made; rewards that he'd never dreamed of fifty years ago. From that point, Papa left the prepared text, carrying the congregation along with him for a glimpse from Pisgah's height back over the years he'd lived.

The viewpoint was certainly unique. We heard nothing we usually heard at services of this type, where people sang "God be with you till we meet again," sniffing audibly the while. There was the freshness of wind blowing in his face, the seasoned grace of the veteran. "Will you pardon an old man if he takes this opportunity to reminisce?" he asked. "I'd like to tell you how the Lord gave me a preacher son."

The congregation urged him on audibly.

"Who couldn't preach to such an audience?" he said again. "Long ago, I realized I'd never be a 'great preacher,' so I began to pray for a preacher son. Some of you older ones may remember the first-born son we called 'Manly,' after the great professor at the seminary. I thought surely he was the answer to my prayer. He had a remarkable conversion and showed every promise." Papa paused briefly. "But God saw otherwise."

"In the beloved soil of North Carolina lie the bodies of my first little family." His voice, amplified, carried to all parts of the building, but as if recognizing his frailty, people leaned to catch the words. "But my hopes didn't die. I began to realize that I'd have to pray for the mother of a preacher if I still wanted that preacher son."

Here he whipped out a handkerchief and blew his nose. "You courtin' couples," he said, "don't be ashamed to examine that sweetheart of yours. Would she or he make a good parent? Might prevent some of these divorces we hear so much about, see?"

A young man seated in front of Celia grinned down at his companion. "Believe he knows what he's talking about," he whispered.

"So I began to look for one to be the mother of a preacher." He sketched the details of his courtship. In imagination, we could see Mother's rosy embarrassment, could she have heard it. But even the children seemed to enjoy the chronicle.

"But when our first-born arrived, he was a girl." Papa laughed gently. "You young fathers, you'll never know what's sweet until you have a daughter. I wasn't disappointed, I assure you. But still I wanted a preacher.

"Came a son. A beautiful brown-eyed baby like his mother. Surely here was the answer. But his aptitudes were for art and music. Could he be the answer? Then, you know what happened. Our Gordon was needed in the heavenly choir.

"But there were other children. Over here in North Carolina a second son made his appearance. By the way, I've been around the world five times, to Australia twice, and I've never found a better place to be born." There was a rustle of appreciation. No one seemed to mind the frequent digressions.

"We called him Ralph. Ralph Alderman. Come to think of it, you all know him. I'll just leave you to judge: has God answered my prayer?"

It wouldn't have been in character for Papa to make much over the sacrifice involved in seeing Mary go. He wasn't singing a swan song, then or ever. But we could tell he ached to feel needed somewhere in the world he loved. He divided his time between his children, usually managing to spend all but the coldest months in the mountains at Susie's home.

Susie should have foreseen what was to follow, but she thought the lively correspondence with a friend of his youth would be merely a diverting friendship, and good for him. Then, one day, he threw his bomb. "What would you say if I told you I was planning to get married, Susie?"

Susie groped for a chair. "M-married?" she echoed stupidly. Golly, what did you do in a circumstance like this?

"I did well on two occasions, and I—well, we've both been lonely—" he finished lamely.

Susie caught herself in time. No matter what people said here, the Chinese had something: if the aged were robbed of their dignity, everyone was the loser. "Whew!" she exclaimed. "You've certainly caught me off guard. But," she went on, feeling her way, "if it's the Lord's will, it will be all right with me, I guess."

Papa breathed a sigh of relief. Apparently the thought of telling us had been harder than proposing to his friend.

Meantime, Susie was fighting for control. "He's being childlike, not childish," she told herself, "and there's not a *thing* wrong with that!"

"But I've never been one who—that is, I could never be sure I could *find* the will of the Lord," he said timidly.

Susie put her arm around him. *It was there, as clear as the nose on his face: he'd always depended on Mother to pronounce the "amen" on the will of the Lord for him. How could he know it without her?*

"Just don't rush things, Papa," she said. "If it's God's will, everything will work out in time, but we can't push, can we?"

But the others weren't as well prepared for the shock as Susie was. They descended on her in consternation.

"He'll get himself into a mess," Celia said, "and who can do for him what he'll need then? Susie, you could always make him do what you wanted. Do something!"

"What I'm afraid of is that he'll wreck the car and hurt himself on these jaunts to Asheville and back," Ralph said.

But Susie held her ground. "He's to be treated like an adult," she insisted. "It's time we practiced what he's been preaching and had a little of the faith in him that he's had in us for so long. What if he does shorten his days? Would that be the worst that could happen?"

One day he walked into a haberdashery. He picked out three suits to try on. "I'll bet you can't guess what I'm buying a suit for," he said to the clerk.

The clerk smoothed the coat over the staunchly-erect shoulders, turning Papa to see himself in the mirror. Papa's chin lifted. "It's my wedding suit," he said, proudly.

But he was never to wear it so. To celebrate his eightieth birthday, Celia invited several of his friends and the remaining members of his family to a meal in the back yard of her home in Raleigh. A cousin, recording the event on film, caught Papa moving happily from one group to another, stooping to catch up the youngest grandchild, Ralph's daughter Margaret. Someone suggested that he demonstrate his agility on his bicycle, so he rode gaily by the camera, waving his hand jauntily.

"I'm driving down to Wilmington to see you next week," Papa told Uncle Jimmie. "I've got some work to do down that way." Gone was the wistfulness.

"Work to do?" Uncle Jimmie echoed. "I thought you were retired."

"Fellow down there changed a tire for me once, and I forgot to ask him if he was a Christian. He might not know what he's missing. One good turn deserves another, you know."

Thus it was that he started again on his last missionary journey. After he'd kissed Celia's family good-bye, he bowed his head a few moments over the wheel, and was off.

And he was kept in safety through all his little journey.

Back in Raleigh, he decided to run down to the laundry to pick up his stiff white collars, the kind he still wore with old fashioned dignity.

"It was such a little trip it never occurred to me to pray about it," he mourned to the ambulance attendants, as they eased him, gently supporting his broken hip, to the stretcher.

"He wants to see you before having the bone pinned," Celia told Susie by long distance. "Doctor Lawrence will wait."

Susie drove all night to be with him. He looked up gratefully when she entered the room. "I'm ready," he said then.

The nurse tried to remove his teeth. "Mumble, mumble, dhju chatchg," he said. The gums were swollen where he'd hit his face on the steering gear when the car ran into the embankment. "I still don't see how I could have been so stupid," he said. "I saw that retaining wall and knew I had to turn, but turn I couldn't."

Again he tried to loosen his teeth. "Blbuhw wcbyt dth ghjk teee." He waved dismissal to the nurse, who was trying again to assist him. "If you want to get a good set of false teeth, be sure to go to Dr. Watkins in Winston-Salem," he said helpfully.

"I'll remember that," Dr. Lawrence said, as the attendants wheeled Papa out.

Dr. Lawrence turned to us. "Did you ever see anything so—so *clean?*" he said, and walked over to the window to stare down at the glossy leaves of a magnolia far below him on the lawn. "Most old men in pain like that would be hollering to high heaven." He ran his fingers through his handsome red hair. "You see, I remember what they did to him in Fuquay. *He* should be operating on *me,* not *I* on *him!*"

Papa's recovery was remarkable. "This is the third time I've walked on crutches. I should be in practice." With his attention centered on getting well again, the romance died a natural death. Again Papa was dividing his time between us.

One day at Susie's, the telephone rang. Ruby Louthan was calling from the hospital. "Susie, Mr. Herring has walked all the way down here to visit Mac, and though he won't admit it, I'm sure he must be pretty tired. I just thought you'd like to know. I'm sure his visit did Mac more good than any other medicine he's had here."

Susie grabbed up the baby and ran across the street to a neighbor. "Hattie, could you, just by accident, of course, drive down toward the hospital and pick up Papa?" It was the darndest thing the way everybody had adopted Papa.

"Well, well," Papa exclaimed, unaware of any conniving. "Hattie! You couldn't have come along at a better time! Those blocks were growing longer by the minute."

Soon he was discarding the crutches and walking with a cane. But once in a while, like a whisper of things to come, he had what he called a "dizzy spell." Seated at the table one night, he sagged to one side.

"I'm all right," he murmured to Clinton, who reached out a hand to stay him.

Over Papa's protests, Susie called Doctor Slusher. "Quit babying me. You're making a fuss over nothing!" Papa said.

"But he's one of our best friends, Papa. We're not making a fuss."

Papa consented to lie down on the couch, but rose to greet the doctor.

Doctor Slusher seemed to enjoy his visit thoroughly. On the porch he said to Susie, "I'll send back some medicine by your husband. But you know, of course, that one of these spells will take him off. Gently. That's the way he's lived, isn't it?"

Susie nodded, her eyes misting.

Once, while on a shopping trip, Papa had to lean against a car for a moment to regain his balance. A passer-by stopped and stayed with him till he could catch a bus home. Shakespeare had it right. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." Papa had never tolerated restraints while well; it seemed incongruous to insist on them now by hovering over him in his growing weakness.

"The only thing wrong about staying with you, Susie, is that you're not living in North Carolina," Papa said as he boarded the bus for a short visit to Winston-Salem and Ralph's.

He kissed the children and Susie and turned on the step. "Did I thank you for everything?" he asked. "I meant to."

The bus driver helped him to a seat. But he came back to the door again. "*Bu sung*, don't wait to see me off," he said clearly. It was the old Chinese courtesy of a parting guest. . . .

Susie hid her face in the baby's neck lest he see her tears. They both knew it was "Good-bye."

A few days later, Ralph telephoned. "He lost consciousness last night and we took him to the hospital this morning. No, he doesn't know us, or anything."

"I'm coming," Susie said. In a matter of minutes she was on her way.

All over the mountains the tender greens of April were crowding out the somber browns of winter. The air smelled fresh and sweet, but along the ridges the bright sunlight had hardly dispelled the chill of winter. Susie dreaded the garish efficiency of the hospital. That wasn't the way she'd always thought it would be, for Papa. How *should* it be? Distant bugles? "Hold the fort for I am coming . . . ?" Footsteps dimming on carpets of pine?

When she arrived, Papa was already gone.

And then she remembered: that's the way he would have had it. He never liked to say good-bye.

DATE DUE

[illegible]
~~AUG 4~~ '64
[illegible]
NOV 3 0 '64
DEC 1 [illegible] '64
JAN 4 [illegible]
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